

February 22, 1999
Sudan
president
says
ready to
let south
secede

Iraqi FM arrives today

AMMAN (J.T.) — Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Saeed Al Sahaf is due to arrive in Amman today for a two-day visit, officials said Monday. "The Iraqi foreign minister is expected to hold talks with His Majesty King Abdullah and senior Jordanian officials on bilateral and regional issues," one official source told the Jordan Times Monday. Sahaf's visit to Amman comes as part of a regional tour aimed at shedding light on the present situation in Iraq.

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'King to meet
with Netanyahu
on Sunday'

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu plans to travel to Amman Sunday for talks with His Majesty King Abdullah, a senior Israeli official said on Monday. "The prime minister is likely to meet King Abdullah on Sunday," the close aide to Netanyahu told AFP. He said Israel was waiting for final confirmation of the meeting from the Royal Palace in Amman. Israel Radio said Netanyahu would be accompanied by Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon. Netanyahu and Sharon had been due to visit King Abdullah on Feb. 7, but that meeting was cancelled when King Hussein returned from the U.S.

Two U.S. cabinet
members held
in contempt

WASHINGTON (R) — A federal judge on Monday found two of President Bill Clinton's top cabinet members, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, in contempt of court for failing to produce records of native American trust funds. The contempt finding against the two U.S. cabinet members stemmed from a civil lawsuit filed in 1996 by five native Americans claiming the federal government mismanaged billions of dollars in the trust funds. U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth found "clear and convincing evidence" that Babbitt, Rubin and Assistant Interior Secretary Kevin Gover were in contempt for disobeying his earlier orders requiring that the documents be produced. "The federal government...engaged in a shocking pattern of deception of the court. I have never seen more egregious conduct by the federal government," he said in the 76-page ruling.

Children, teacher
stabbed in Latvia

RIGA (AFP) — Three young children and their teacher were stabbed to death on Monday in the eastern Latvian town of Gulbene, police said. A 21-year-old man entered a nursery in the town at around 2:00 p.m. local time and stabbed three girls, who were aged five to seven, and their teacher. 32, police said. A suspect trying to flee the town was later detained.

NYC seizes cars
of drunken drivers

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City stepped up the war on drinking and driving Monday, authorising police to seize the cars of drunken drivers. Under the initiative, any driver found behind the wheel of the car with a blood alcohol reading of 0.1 per cent will immediately forfeit their car in addition to any criminal proceedings for driving under the influence. The American Civil Liberties Union immediately announced it would challenge the decision in the courts.

EU farmers, police
clash during demo

BRUSSELS (AP) — Tens of thousands of farmers from across the European Union (EU) demonstrated in Brussels Monday, and some fought pitched battles with police over plans to reform the EU's bloated agricultural subsidy programmes. The protesters marched despite half snow, sleet and high winds during one of the worst days of a bad winter. Police cordoned off a wide zone around EU headquarters and intervened with water cannons when some demonstrators attacked them with cobblestones, uprooted trees and traffic signs in attempts to cross heavily guarded barbed-wire barricades.

Iraq denies Shiite unrest; reported death toll tops 100

AMMAN (AFP) — The death toll in Shiite Muslim protests in Iraq sparked by the assassination of a senior cleric has topped 100 in Baghdad, Iraqi sources said Monday, as the government denied riots were sweeping the capital and southern towns.

With journalists in the Iraqi capital barred from visiting the scenes of the reported unrest until Tuesday at the earliest, no confirmation was available of either of the conflicting accounts.

Armoured vehicles patrolled the streets of many of Iraq's main cities as clashes with the Shiite Muslim protesters entered a third straight day leaving at least 100 dead in Baghdad alone, witnesses and other Iraqi sources told AFP.

The unrest in towns across the mainly Shiite south as well as in Shiite districts of Baghdad prompted the authorities to resort to artillery shelling against one of the flashpoints, exiled opposition groups said.

The Iraqi government firmly denied it all.

"We reaffirm that any talk of disturbances and riots in Iraq is totally unfounded," the director of the official news agency INA, Uday Al Tai, told reporters in Baghdad.

Tai said the information ministry would organise guided

tours for journalists to see two southern provinces.

"You will recognise by yourselves that all the allegations promoted by those seeking to dismember the unity of the steadfast people of Iraq and to undermine their own country's sovereignty were mere figments of imagination."

Iraqi state television, as part of efforts to discredit reports of unrest on Monday broadcast scenes of normal activity in the Shiite holy city of Najaf.

A large number of Shiites were shown praying at the mausoleum of Imam Hussein, while other scenes were of normal traffic and activity in the marketplace of the southern city.

Iraqi TV also broadcast services of condolence for Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq Al Sader, the top Shiite cleric who was gunned down in the city with two of his sons on Friday, sparking the reported anti-government unrest on Saturday.

It was unclear when the film was taken.

A newspaper also reported Monday that President Saddam Hussein had sent an envoy to Najaf to present his condolences to the family of the slain cleric.

Babel said the president sent Mohammad Hamza Al Zubaidi, a Shiite member of the deci-

sion-making Revolutionary Command Council, on Sunday.

The family of the cleric "expressed their gratitude" to Saddam, according to the newspaper, which is run by the president's son Uday.

While the Iraqi authorities dismissed the reports of unrest, an Iraqi source contacted by telephone from Amman said the security forces had been placed on maximum alert.

"Armoured vehicles and armed members of the ruling Baath Party are patrolling the streets of the capital and all other towns, particularly the Shiite towns in the south," the source said.

One witness said that security forces had "fired blindly into crowds of demonstrators [in Baghdad's Saddam City] leaving a real carnage."

Despite reports from witnesses that the trouble had died down in the suburbs and in Najaf, exiled opposition groups insisted unrest was continuing.

The latest protests were centered on the southern towns of Hillah, Karbala and Nasiriyah, as well as parts of the capital, the opposition said.

At least 18 people were killed in Nasiriyah when army units encircled the town and shelled it with heavy artillery and mortars, the Tehran-based Supreme

Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) said.

In Babylon province just south of the capital, "clashes between residents and Republican Guards and Baath party members left dozens dead and injured," it said.

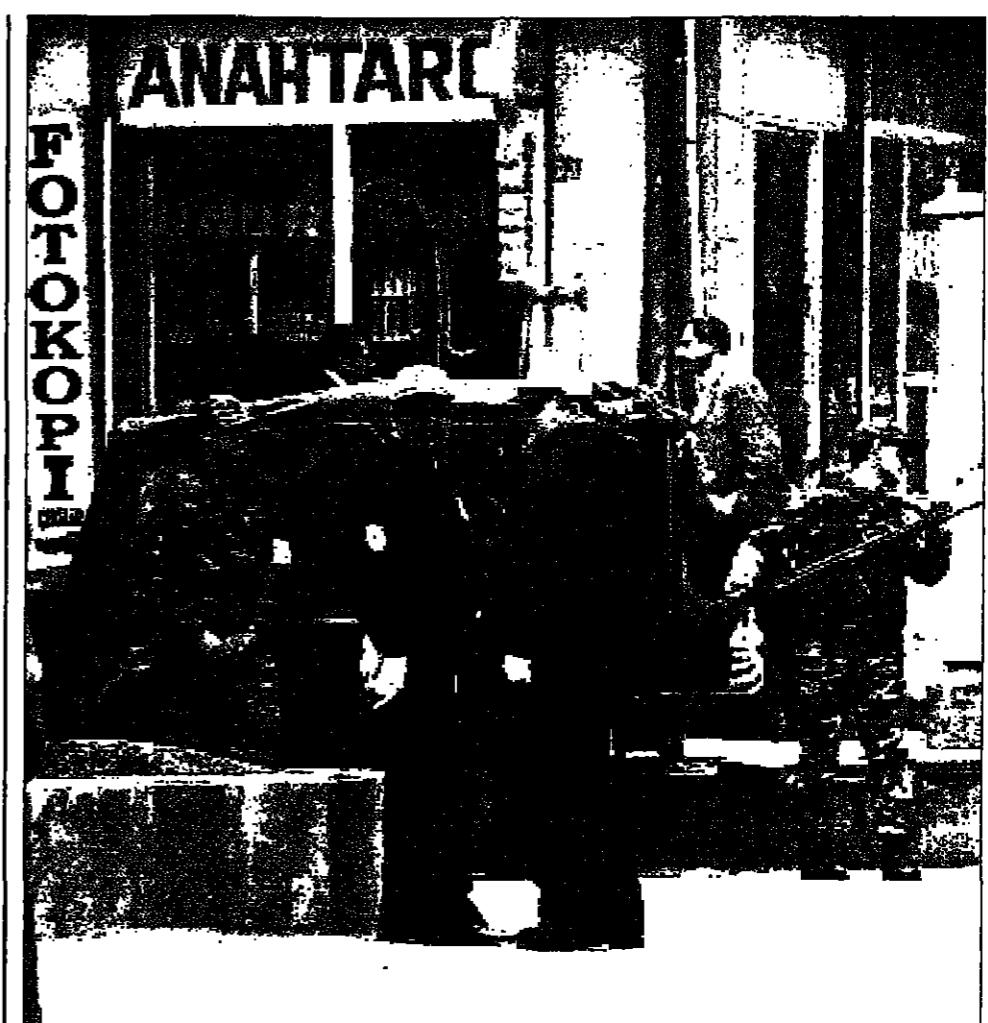
The group's leader Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir Al Hakim gave a death toll of 25 dead and 250 injured from the first two days of clashes.

Another Shiite opposition group, the Da'wa party, said the clashes escalated in the capital Monday with protesters attacking offices of the ruling Baath Party and killing "large numbers" of regime supporters.

The group also charged that the regime was stopping travellers from the south reaching Baghdad in a bid to prevent news of the unrest there reaching the capital.

The clashes are the first report of widespread unrest in Iraq since 1991, when a bloody crackdown suppressed a Shiite uprising in southern and central Iraq following Baghdad's defeat by a U.S.-led coalition in the 1991 Gulf War.

Shiites make up around 65 per cent of Iraq's 22 million population but play little part in the government which is dominated by the Sunni Muslim Arab minority.



Two police officers chat Monday in front of a military jeep, as a soldier stands nearby on a main street in Diyarbakir, Turkey. Many shops in the city centre were closed for a few hours after PKK rebels threatened shopkeepers in protest against the capture of their leader Abdullah Ocalan (AP photo)

Turkey warns Greece of 'right to self-defence over PKK support'

Ocalan admits Greek support for rebels — report

Agencies

TURKISH PRESIDENT Suleyman Demirel accused Greece of supporting Kurdish rebels fighting the Ankara government and warned Turkey would use its "right to self-defence" if this support continued, Turkey's NTV news channel said on Monday.

"If [Greece] prefers to continue its illegal acts, we reserve our right to take measures aimed at legitimate self-defence which arises from international law," Demirel was reported to have said in a television interview in the Philippines, where he is on an official visit.

As always we continue to make every effort possible to minimise civilian casualties and collateral damage," he said.

According to Iraq, which does not recognise exclusion zones enforced in the north and south by Washington and London, 11 people have been killed in attacks by U.S. and British warplanes since Feb. 4.

"We've seen this pattern of cheat-and-retreat by the Iraqi aircraft for several months now, and that's provocation enough to strike," he said.

Iraq's official INA news agency reported one Iraqi had been killed and several others wounded.

An Iraqi military spokesman, quoted by INA, said 10 formations of "enemy" planes carried out 32 sorties in a "no-fly" zone over southern Iraq, penetrating the front from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Lamarca said the Iraqi MiG jets had not attacked allied forces, but their flight over the no-fly zone imposed on Iraq by us and British forces since the 1991 Gulf War was considered sufficient cause for reprisal.

"We have said repeatedly that we would respond to any Iraqi provocation as we deem appropriate to ensure the safety of our forces in the area, and that's

what we did," Lamarca said.

He said U.S. Air Force F-15E Strike Eagles and British GR-1 Tornados hit two communications facilities and two weapons storage facilities in the vicinity of Basra, Iraq.

As for the Iraqi reports of one death and several wounded, "that's something Iraq has said many times... they've made claims of casualties, but we have no independent confirmation of those," Lamarca said.

Demirel charged that Greece had for long years been an "accomplice" of the outlawed Kurdish Labour Party (PKK), adding that Greek officials had themselves admitted to supporting the group, which Ankara regards as "terrorists."

"Greece should be included in the list of countries which support terrorism and abet terrorists. Such a state can only be described as an illegal state," he said.

NTV quoted Demirel as saying that Ankara would like to give Athens "one more chance" and calling on Greek officials to condemn the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) and comply with their international obligations.

Ocalan has told interrogators that Greece gave his guerrilla army weapons and training, a Turkish newspaper reported Monday.

The national daily newspaper Hurriyet said Ocalan provided

The statement by EU foreign ministers seemed likely to further inflame relations with Turkey, which has warned the 15-nation bloc not to exert pressure on it.

The ministers also said that while they accepted Turkey's territorial integrity, they expected it to resolve its problems by political means with full respect for human rights.

"The EU takes note of the assurances of the Turkish government that Abdullah Ocalan will have a fair trial," the EU ministers said in the statement. "It expects this to mean fair and correct treatment and an open trial according to the rule of law before an independent court, with access to legal counsel of his choice and with international observers admitted to the trial."

Demirel's comments were the strongest reaction from Ankara to neighbouring Athens after Greece admitted that Ocalan took shelter for 12 days at the Greek ambassador's residence in Nairobi, Kenya, before being brought to Turkey on Tuesday.

Athens' involvement in the Ocalan affair has already led to the resignations of three Greek ministers and the head of the Greek secret service, with calls from the opposition for the resignation of Prime Minister Costas Simitis as well.

Ankara has accused Athens several times of supporting the PKK which has been fighting for self-rule in mostly Kurdish-populated southeastern Turkey since 1984.

Economic delegation returns from talks in Saudi Arabia

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan's top-level economic team returned here last night from Saudi Arabia, where they met with Crown Prince Abdullah Ben Abdul Aziz to discuss means to develop an institutional framework for long-term trade and economic ties.

The delegation conveyed greetings from His Majesty King Abdullah and HRH Crown Prince Hamzah to King Fahd Ben Abdul Aziz and the crown prince.

During a meeting with Saudi Finance Minister Ibrahim Assaf, the team of Finance Minister Michel Marto, Minister of State for Development Affairs Taher Kan'an, Planning Minister Nabil Ammari and Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister Bassem Awadallah discussed Saudi financial aid to Jordan, Jordan Television reported.

The ministers also reviewed obstacles to the advancement of the Jordanian economy.

Saudi leaders, in particular the crown prince, have expressed support for Jordan after King Abdullah acceded to the Throne earlier this month following the death of King Hussein.

Assaf, who visited Amman last week for talks with Jordanian Prime Minister Fayed Tarawneh, said Saudi Arabia

U.S. bombs sites in Iraq; Baghdad reports casualties

WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S. fighter jets bombed sites in both northern and southern Iraq Monday in response to provocation," the U.S. military said.

The bombing in the south "was in response to two Iraqi MiG 23 jets entering the southern no-fly zone," said Major Joe Lamarca, spokesman for the U.S. Central Command in Tampa, Florida.

Earlier this month, the Saudi-owned newspaper Al Sharq Al Awsat had reported that Saudi Arabia was ready to supply Jordan with oil at cut-rate prices.

Kan'an on Sunday said a delegation from the Saudi Development Fund would visit Amman soon for talks on the projects which it would like Riyadh to help finance, particularly infrastructure projects.

The delegation also met with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal for discussions on bilateral ties and means of enhancing them.

efforts to enhance such solidarity and improve inter-Arab relations.

The minister stressed that Jordan is keen on promoting its relations and cooperation with its Islamic sister state Iran in various fields. He said that Amman seeks to advance relations with Tehran in the best interest of the two countries and the Islamic Nation.

Attempts by certain circles to damage Jordan's relations with other countries and their desire to distort the Kingdom's clear and firm policies are no more than illusions that deserve no attention, Khatib said.

Khatib dismissed these reports as totally false.

He said Jordan continues to call for the restoration of Arab solidarity and, together with other Arab states, is exerting

conducting routine enforcement of the northern no-fly zone when they are attacked, and they responded by bombing sites near Mosul, Iraq, according to the U.S. European Command.

The U.S. F-15E jets had been

"conducting routine enforcement of the northern no-fly zone when they were attacked, and they responded by bombing sites near Mosul, Iraq, according to the U.S. European Command.

The national daily newspaper Hurriyet said Ocalan provided

Arab American who faced deportation can stay

DETROIT (AP) — A Michigan resident who faced deportation based on an alleged connection to a radical Palestinian group can remain in the United States, the board of immigration appeals ruled.

The decision to allow Imad Hamad to stay is being called a civil rights victory by Arab Americans. "I was in tears when I heard the news," Hamad, 37, said in the Detroit Free Press' Monday edition. "This is a victory not just for me, but also for civil liberties in the U.S."

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) had been trying to deport Hamad for years, using secret evidence to link him with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

Arab-American and civil liberties advocates made the case a priority. They were concerned about the use of secret evidence and the penalizing of Americans with Palestinian sympathies.

Last October, an immigration judge ruled in Hamad's favour.

The INS appealed, but last week a panel of immigration judges upheld the decision.

"The association with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine is unproven," said the judges in their ruling.

The evidence presented is vague, lacking in specificity, and uncorroborated.

Hussein Ibish of the American-Arab

Anti-Discrimination Committee, or ADC, in Washington, D.C., told the Free Press that the decision is a blow against government policies that punish American residents with pro-Arab views.

Hamad came to the United States from Lebanon in 1980 to study. He was active in Palestinian political causes, and demonstrated in a rally protesting Israel's invasion in 1982.

After marrying a U.S. citizen, he applied for permanent residency status. The INS said he was a member of the PFLP, considered a terrorist group by the U.S. State Department, and sought to deport him. But Hamad said all his actions were in support of peaceful activities.

Yemen
denies link
between
suspects
and Ben
Laden

Home News

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Queen receives senators, deputies

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor on Monday received the members of the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament at Bab Al Salam.

Queen Noor, who was very moved and comforted by their visit, expressed His Majesty King Hussein's appreciation and pride in the people's representatives, their hard work and the democratic process in Jordan.

The Queen said that she and the Hashemite Royal Family were very proud of their achievements, adding that they will be a source of strength and support for His Majesty King Abdullah.

With Queen Noor were HRH Prince Hashem, the Speaker of the Upper House Zeid Rifai and Deputy Speaker of the Lower House Bassam Haddadin.



Her Majesty Queen Noor on Monday receives Senator Ahmad Obaidat at Bab Al Salam, where members of both Houses came to offer condolences. Here, also, HRH Prince Hashem receives Senator Mudar Badran (photo by Yousef 'Allan)

Briefs

PM gives press conference today

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Fayed Tarawneh today meets with representatives of local, Arab and international media at Hussein Youth City.

Saudi delegation visits PSD

AMMAN (Petra) — Director of the Public Security Department (PSD) Nasouh Muhieddin received a Saudi delegation representing the ministries of Interior and Labour and Social Affairs. The delegation, which is headed by assistant director of prisoners affairs department at the Interior Ministry visited the Reform and Rehabilitation Centres Department and were briefed on its duties by its Director Brigadier General Sami Al Majali. The delegation also visited the Family Protection Unit at the Amman Police Department and Juweideh Reform and Rehabilitation Centre.

Amended trade law endorsed by Upper House

AMMAN (Petra) — The Upper House of Parliament endorsed the provisional trades licences law No. 2 for the year 1979 after making amendments thereto. The House, meeting under its President Zeid Rifai, rejected the provisional law No. 33 for the year 1989, and the provisional law for 1998, whose provisions have been included in the provisional law No. 2. The House also approved the draft electricity law for the year 1997 which was passed to it by the Lower House. It also approved a recommendation made by a Joint Legal Affairs/ Finance and Economic Committee, providing for retaining a high percentage of investment, i.e. no less than 30 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in order for economic growth to reach aspired levels.

Majali stresses role of Arab Parliaments

VIENNA (Petra) — Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Abdul Hadi Al Majali Monday stressed the important role Arab parliaments can play in the forthcoming International Conference for Speakers of International Parliaments, due to be held at the United Nations Headquarters next year. Majali, who is currently attending an International Preparatory Committee meeting held here, to prepare for the New York Meeting of World Parliaments Speakers, said the New York meeting is aimed at finding the necessary mechanism to boost the role of the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) in dealing with regional and international issues. Majali welcomed the IPU's meeting in Amman in April next year, voicing hope that the meeting will provide an opportunity for parliamentarians from around the world to get first-hand information on regional issues and problems.

Jordanian-Iraqi joint committee to conclude new trade protocol Thursday

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Jordanian-Iraqi joint committee is scheduled to meet in Baghdad on Thursday to conclude a new trade protocol for 1999.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade said Monday that the new protocol will be worth \$200 million down from \$255 million in 1998 due to the drop in oil prices on the international market.

Jordan, which imports its oil and oil products from Iraq with approval from the U.N. Sanctions Committee, had agreed with Iraq last month to reduce the volume of goods and services in the 1999 trade protocol in view of the declined oil prices.

Iraqi Minister of Trade Mohammad Mehdi Saleh, who was in Amman Saturday, said that despite the recent reduction in the trade volume, his country was keen to enhance trade with Jordan.

Saleh told a meeting of Jordanian industrialists

here that Baghdad was considering increasing its imports of Jordanian vegetable oil in line with the oil-for-food agreement it signed with the U.N. in December 1997. That deal allows Iraq to export \$2 billion worth of oil in exchange for food and medicine. The oil sale volume has since been increased to \$5.2 billion.

Thursday's meeting will be co-chaired by Minister of Industry and Trade Mohammad Saleh Hourani and Saleh, and attended by Jordanian industrialists and business community representatives.

Iraq is the largest importer of Jordanian goods among the Arab states, and in 1998 Jordanian industrialists sold to Iraqi markets national products worth JD138 million compared to JD96 million in 1997.

The bulk of Jordanian exports were vegetable oil, soap, medicine and medical supplies, and chemical detergents.

**Save water...
Every drop counts!**

Israel makes about-turn on decision to allow examination of prisoners

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — Israel has reneged on its earlier decision to let a group of doctors chosen by the Jordan Medical Association (JMA) examine 14 Jordanian prisoners held in Israeli jails, a senior official said Monday.

"The Israeli authorities informed us earlier this month about changing their former position which would have allowed five doctors nominated by the JMA to examine the Jordanian prisoners who are presumed ill," Jordanian Ambassador to Israel Omar Rifai told the Jordan Times on Monday.

On Jan. 7 Israel gave its verbal approval to Rifai regarding the list of doctors proposed by the JMA. That list included five doctors living in the Jewish state.

In November, the Jordanian embassy obtained Israeli approval to send physicians to examine the prisoners, many of them said to be suffering from serious psychological and health problems.

"If Israel is playing politics, we will have nothing to do with it," JMA President Bassam Dajani told the Jordan Times on Monday.

"But if Israel deals with

the issue from a humanitarian perspective, then our doctors who live in the West Bank will be available," Dajani added.

Observers said the Israeli authorities are trying to force the association's hand into normalising with the Jewish state.

"The JMA's decision to send a team of doctors on a purely humanitarian mission to examine the Jordanian prisoners, posed the toughest test yet to their determination to fight normalisation," said one observer.

The JMA, a stronghold of anti-normalisation with Israel, together with 12 other professional unions, has threatened to expel any of its members who either visit Israel or conduct activities with the Jewish state.

Reaction to the Israeli decision to renege has aroused anger from the JMA.

"If Israel is playing politics, we will have nothing to do with it," JMA President Bassam Dajani told the Jordan Times on Monday.

"I think we are back to square one," Rifai said yesterday.

He said that although finding doctors to carry out the examinations is

easy, specially among the Arab Israeli doctors living in Israel, it is preferable to have Jordanian doctors examining the Jordanian prisoners."

"It is up to the JMA to state their final position," Rifai said.

The issue of examining the Jordanian prisoners in the Israeli jails was raised after a visit on Oct. 20 by family members of 12 prisoners held in the Jewish state.

The visit was the first to be approved by the Israeli government under the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty.

The families had said the prisoners were suffering from serious health problems, such as fatal attacks on Israelis. The Jewish state insists that they spend their prison terms in Israel, while Jordan is seeking their handing over to Jordanian custody.

However, informed sources said that "in addition to the 14 Jordanians imprisoned on security charges, there are six more held in Israel on criminal offences."

Israel freed most Jordanian prisoners in its jails more than one year ago in exchange for two Mossad agents who attempted to assassinate Khaled Misha'al, a leading member of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, in Amman in 1997.

Workshop for tourism personnel opens in expectation of Millennium tourism boom



Jordan has 210 hotels with 11,500 rooms and 22,000 beds to accommodate tourists (file photo)

Ministry of Agriculture to undertake census over foot-and-mouth disease

Drought exacerbates spread

By Dana Charkasi

during a regular Lower House of Parliament session late Sunday.

He said Jordan had to import from Turkey "after all our supplies against this disease were consumed."

Khreisha, responding to deputies' complaints that scores of livestock had died recently because of polluted animal feed, said tests conducted on barley and other animal fodder stored at the country's main warehouse showed the supplies were safe.

"On the contrary, it was proven to us that the foot-and-mouth (also called hoof-and-mouth) disease had hit the country."

Officials said drought, brought about by scarce winter rainfall, had eliminated vast pastures and with them vital animal feed, which in turn weakened the animal's resistance to the disease.

A local agriculturist said that illegal crossing of borders between Jordan and Syria, and Jordan

and Iraq of grazing livestock has also exposed animals to the disease.

Syria, last November, suffered an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease among its herds, added the agriculturist.

"The disease might affect the quality of milk and meat products from ill animals, but it would still be safe for consumption by human beings," head of the ministry's Livestock and Range Land Administration, Mukhlis Amarin.

The disease, doctors say, does not usually pose

a great problem to grown-up animals, but might be fatal to the newborn as they do not have a strong immune system yet.

Symptoms of the disease are observed in the mouth and the hooves of animals, hence the name.

"Normally, we buy between 300,000 and 350,000 doses of vaccines every year," Amarin said.

The disease can easily spread in densely-populated and non-hygienic stables with animals suffering from lack of space and poor ventilation.

"In such a climate, the disease can flare up and strike animals much harder than usual," Amarin added.

The disease has hit hardest in Jordan's north and in the Badia region which covers half of the country.

Veterinarians say proper vaccination is the only cure..

Amarin said the ministry regularly carries out

routine compulsory vaccinations for 60,000 heads of cattle every year.

It also conducts the so-called "ring-vaccinations" for sheep and other cattle every time there is a breakout of the disease. Under this method, all animals in the affected area will be vaccinated, even in neighbourhoods that have not been hit by the disease.

"Blisters and ulcers will appear inside the mouth along with silver-shining foamy saliva (the disease is also known as 'silver line') that might drool down the animal's mouth.

Blisters will appear in and between the hooves and the horn material of the hooves will split.

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Cows and other livestock have been afflicted with foot-and-mouth disease which is highly-contagious and enzootic (constantly present in a locality) in the Middle East (file photo)

his animals vaccinated against the disease for free.

The government has also cut the prices of fodder sold to livestock farmers and is offering them free water to help their animals.

Rambouillet talks divide Western allies

RAMBOUILLET, France (AP) — Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's tough tactics have pushed the Kosovo peace talks to the brink of collapse, driving a wedge between Western allies and poisoning prospects for agreement.

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright returned here Monday to push the belligerents hard to make a deal, with just one day left before the latest deadline of 3 p.m. (1400 GMT) Tuesday.

Albright's press secretary, James P. Rubin, said she had telephone conversations with NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Albanian officials in Tirana and planned to call President Bill Clinton, but he reported no progress in the talks Monday.

The phone calls, he said, were to work up support for "the emerging agreement" of the Kosovo Albanians. Their demand for a referendum on independence was still the major sticking point, he said.

"Kosovo Albanians continue to move forward towards an agreement," Rubin said. "The Serbs are not engaged seriously on the military part, which is an integral part of the agreement."

Serbian President Milan Milutinovic said Sunday Belgrade will reject any foreign troops in Kosovo as part of a three-year interim

agreement with the ethnic Albanians, who make up 90 percent of Kosovo's population.

That attitude threatens to be the deal-breaker and could result in NATO airstrikes on Serbia.

Serbian negotiators say they are prepared to sign a deal giving Kosovo Albanians wide autonomy, but they refuse a military annex to the agreement that calls for up to 30,000 NATO troops to implement the deal.

"The Serbian side believes it can have half a deal," said Albright. "There are not two documents. There is one document with two parts to it." The state-run Tanjug news agency quoted Milutinovic as standing firm.

"Our delegation will not in any form agree to the deployment of any kind of foreign troops on the territory of Yugoslavia," he was quoted as saying, reflecting the views of the top man, Milosevic. "That is our final stand."

An estimated 2,000 people have died and hundreds of thousands have been driven from their homes in Kosovo over the past year.

"If we have a yes from both sides, we will have an implementation force," Albright said.

"If the talks crater because the Serbs do not say yes, we will have bombing. If the talks crater because the Albanians have not said yes,



A group of Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) guerrillas sing and wave on top of a truck as they leave the battlefield 30 km northeast of the regional capital Pristina. Heavy fighting broke out between KLA and Yugoslav forces in northern Kosovo Monday forcing thousands of ethnic Albanians to flee their homes (Reuters photo).

will not be able to support them and in fact will have to cut off whatever help they are getting from the outside.

"If it fails because both parties say no, there will not be bombing of Serbia and we will try to figure out ways to continue trying to deal with both sides."

Jakup Krasniqi, a senior Kosovo Liberation Army official and member of the ethnic Albanian delegation here, said in an interview distributed Sunday the ethnic Albanians will not sign an agreement unless it includes NATO.

The crafty Milosevic has succeeded in splitting the six-nation Contact Group — the United States, Russia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy — over the past two weeks of talks, making prospects for reaching a deal even dimmer.

Russia has been noncommittal about NATO troops and has adamantly opposed conducting punitive airstrikes on Serbia, its old ally. Now the other Europeans, less convinced than the Americans that Serbia is the sole bad guy in

the talks, are having second thoughts.

"At the moment we have on the Belgrade side a government that is accepting the constitutional settlement for a self-governing Kosovo, but we don't have the Kosovar side that is doing so," Cook said in a British Broadcasting Corp. interview.

"In that context, airstrikes on Belgrade are not going to help," Yugoslav government-controlled media presented the decision to extend the deadline as a triumph for Belgrade.

Discord in the Contact Group, said the headline on the state-controlled newspaper Politika.

The 15-nation European Union added its pressure on the Serbs Monday, saying the EU is ready to lift trade and other sanctions against Yugoslavia gradually if a deal is reached.

These sanctions include an arms embargo, a ban on new investments and travel visas for Yugoslav government officials, a freezing of Yugoslav assets abroad and a ban on commercial flights to and from Yugoslavia.

Serb police rough up two peace officials in Kosovo

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia (AP) — Two unarmed peace monitors were assaulted by Serbian police in Kosovo, but were not seriously hurt, the international peace mission in the Yugoslav province said Monday.

With the deadline approaching for agreement in Kosovo peace talks, the monitors — from Lithuania and Luxembourg — were on their regular patrol in the Serbian province late Sunday, observing Yugoslav troop movements, said Jorgen Grunnet, spokesman for the Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe that runs the mission of monitors.

The two policemen confronted them and after a brief argument "roughed up" the observers, said Grunnet.

The OSCE Kosovo verification mission considers this "aggressive behaviour on the part of the police ... a serious case of insubordination" and a strong protest was sent to the authorities, he added.

The two peace verifiers were "bit shaken but not seriously hurt," the spokesman said. The incident occurred some 32 kilometers north of capital Pristina. Names of the assaulted peace workers were not immediately available.

The observed movement of Yugoslav army troops has somewhat intensified over the last days, Grunnet said, apparently "a general show of alertness."

The army has been under threat of NATO strikes if the country rejects a peace deal for Kosovo, currently

negotiated in France, that would give broad autonomy to the province and allow deployment of NATO forces here.

Grunnet said the police also harassed an unspecified number of other OSCE personnel, when they were entering the country from neighbouring Macedonia Sunday. The Yugoslav border authorities insisted on searching their vehicles which, Grunnet said, was against an international convention on treatment of the peace officials.

Early Monday, the police checked the identities of a number of locally hired OSCE employees, apparently ethnic Albanians, who were aboard an OSCE bus taking them to work in the mission's headquarters in Pristina. Grunnet said this was also against the rules.

The observed movement of Yugoslav army troops has somewhat intensified over the last days, Grunnet said, apparently "a general show of alertness."

The army has been under threat of NATO strikes if the country rejects a peace deal for Kosovo, currently

Russian space station welcomes likely last crew

KOROLOVY, Russia (AP) — Russia's veteran space station welcomed what could be its last crew Monday as a troika of cosmonauts boarded the craft and prepared for a six-month mission that could conclude Mir's 13-year space Odyssey.

Frenchman Jean-Pierre Haignere, Russian Viktor Afanasyev and Slovak Ivan Bella docked their Soyuz module with the space station at 0536 GMT and hauled themselves into Mir some 90 minutes later to enthusiastic applause from space officials watching from mission control in this Moscow suburb.

The trio were greeted with the traditional Russian welcome of bread and salt proffered by the two cosmonauts who have manned Mir since last August, Gennady Padalka and Sergei Avdeyev.

"We have a long road ahead, but we are ready and I am proud," said Haignere during a 10-minute link-up with earth shortly after the crew entered the station. "It's a good symbol of success."

The cosmonauts were pictured smiling during the satellite link-up as they briefed ground con-

trol. French Ambassador in Moscow Hubert Colin de Verdure wished his compatriot well for his "this important mission."

Slovak Ambassador Roman Palik was likewise present, as were the great and good of Russia's space programme.

The three cosmonauts blasted off from Baikonur, Kazakhstan, Saturday and orbited earth at a speed of eight kilometers a second before hooking up with Mir.

Bella, the first Slovak in space, will leave Mir in eight days time with Padalka, but the other three will remain on the space station conducting experiments and four space walks until the final destiny of the Orbiter is decided.

"The events of these last few days show that Russian cosmonauts continue to show their capabilities despite the difficulties," said Russian space agency chief Yury Koptev.

"We are working actively to find external funds but the question has not been settled yet."

Russia is desperately searching for a commercial investor to take a stake in Mir so that the craft, which costs \$250 million a year to keep in space, can remain in orbit.

ASEM host Germany bars Spratlys dispute from agenda

MANILA (AFP) — Germany, which hosts a meeting of Asian and European foreign ministers next month, has opposed putting a territorial dispute between the Philippines and China on the agenda, a Filipino diplomat said Monday.

Antonio Rodriguez, Philippine charge d'affaires in Bonn, reported to the department of foreign affairs here Germany's position on the dispute over a reef in the south China Sea's Spratly Islands chain.

"With the Chinese 'veto', this effectively meant that the south China Sea as an agenda item was a 'dead duck,'" he said, adding ASEM also works on a system of consensus among all 25 members.

Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Lauro Baja told reporters however that Manila will still push for the structure's inclusion.

"When we bring in the South China Sea, we will not do it in a confrontational manner which will disrupt the proceedings," said Baja, who directed Rodriguez to meet with a higher German official to confirm Stak's statements.

Ties between China and the Philippines have been strained after Manila

accused Beijing last year of expanding permanent structures on Mischief Reef, which Manila claims is within its 200-mile exclusive economic zone as defined by a U.N. convention.

The reef lies within the South China Sea's Spratly Island chain, believed to include vast mineral deposits and straddling vital shipping lanes.

Philippine defence officials said the structures had been completed and they appeared to be for military use rather than as fishermen's shelters as China has claimed.

ASEM, set up in 1996, brings together the foreign ministers of seven of the nine members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as well as China, Japan and South Korea, and the 15 members of the European Union.

Thailand, Cambodia agree to demine border

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Thailand and Cambodia Monday announced they would cooperate to demine the border between the two countries and said they hoped for more foreign aid to back the project.

Thai Deputy Foreign Minister Sukhumhand Puribatra and Cambodian Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs Khong Sam Nuon called for extra aid after signing the joint action agreement at this border village in 1979.

Lesser insurgencies around Thailand's borders with Myanmar, Laos and Malaysia have also left a deadly residue of mines.

Thailand pledged to remove all mines on its borders within three years.

But Lieutenant General Vasu Chanarat, director-general of the Thai Mines Action Centre (TMAC), said the legacy of mines would keep his organisation busy for another nine years.

"We hope assistance from foreign countries will come after this joint announcement," Sukhumhand said.

"Landmines have killed and maimed countless innocent civilians along the Thai-Cambodia border, destroyed livelihoods and obstructed economic and social development."

"We need the assistance of

foreign countries while we are suffering from the economic crisis. We have a limited budget to demine," Vasu said.

A 1998 army survey showed 469 square kilometres of Thailand are mined, including 205 square kilometres on the Cambodian border, 124 square kilometres on the Lao border and the remainder on the frontiers with Myanmar and Malaysia.

There are an estimated four to six million land mines in Cambodia, one of the most heavily mined countries in the world.

A Red Cross report released in October said just under 1,000 people were killed or injured by mines in Cambodia between January and September last year, 13 per cent less than the same period of 1997. There were 1,369 casualties in the whole of 1997 and 2,766 in 1996, it said.

Some 40 per cent of Cambodian landmine casualties were civilians, with most incidents happening while people were farming or collecting food.

NEWS IN BRIEF

British family doctor facing 15 murder charges

MANCHESTER, England (AFP) — A British family doctor already accused of murdering eight of his women patients was charged with seven more murders Monday, police said. Harold Shipman, 52, who practises in Hyde, near Manchester in northwest England, now faces a total of 15 murder charges. He is expected to appear before a magistrate's court later Monday. The doctor has already pleaded not guilty to four murder charges. He has formally pleaded not guilty to murdering Kathleen Grundy, 81, Winifred Mellor and Joan Melia, both 73, and 49-year-old Bianka Pomfret, who died between 1997 and 1998. A provisional trial date has been set for October.

British balloonists hit jet stream over Africa

LONDON (R) — The pilots of a British round-the-world balloon expedition Monday picked up the jet stream winds over Africa that they hope will rocket them eastwards in their record attempt. Pilots Andy Elson, 45, and Colin Prescott, 48, plan to head to India at up to 160 kph in a balloon. After nearly six days of low-level manoeuvring southwards underneath the jet stream, the balloon team ascended to 8,000 metres over Mali in west Africa. "We are now on our way," said flight director Ian Ashpole at mission control in London. "Entering the jet stream this far south has meant that we have the most favourable trajectory." The team, sponsored by British Communications Group Cable and Wireless Plc, launched Wednesday. They have already conducted two precarious sky walks to carry out repairs. Around 20 earlier attempts to fly around the world in a balloon have failed, the most recent by British tycoon Richard Branson and American Steve Fossett, who came down in the Pacific on Dec. 25 when an area of low pressure blocked their path. Cable and Wireless is expected to reach Indian airspace by Friday and then swing round the south of China. China put a ban on British balloons crossing its territory in December when Branson and Fossett accidentally drifted into forbidden areas. At least five other round-the-world attempts are being prepared.

Tortured Zimbabwe pressmen to appear in court Monday

HARARE (AFP) — Two Zimbabwean journalists who were arrested and tortured last month for reporting an alleged coup plot against President Robert Mugabe are due to appear in court Monday. They face charges of publishing false news likely to cause alarm and despondency. Editor Mark Chavunda and reporter Ray Choto will appear before a magistrate's court for contravening a section of the law and order (maintenance) act after running a story in their independent Sunday Standard paper, which claimed that 23 Zimbabwean army officers had been arrested for plotting a military coup. The two journalists said they were severely tortured during the detention by the military and a medical doctor confirmed that they had been subjected to electric shocks and physical assault. The two are currently out of custody on bail conditions which forbid them from travelling outside the country.

Hong Kong triad suspects sought in Japan drug bust

TOKYO (R) — Japanese police said Monday they were seeking two suspected members of a Hong Kong triad crime syndicate in connection with a drug bust that netted more than 200 kg of illegal stimulants, Kyodo news agency reported. It was the first time that members of the Hong Kong triads have been implicated in large-scale smuggling of drugs into Japan, police were quoted as telling Kyodo. Kyodo reported that police and customs officials said the two were believed to have hired four Chinese nationals who were arrested on Feb. 1 on suspicion of transporting 202 kg of amphetamines to a warehouse in Chiba, just east of Tokyo, where the drugs were seized. The drugs had an estimated street value of more than 11 billion Yen (\$90 million), police were quoted as saying. Investigations revealed that one of the four was a low-ranking member of a Hong Kong triad, police told Kyodo. The stimulants were concealed in the inner wall of a container filled with computer components that was packed in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou in mid-January and arrived in Yokohama on Jan. 20, Kyodo said. Police declined to speak to Reuters about the case.

Passengers evacuated from car ferry outside of French port

LILLE, France (AP) — About 15 passengers on a British car ferry were evacuated by helicopter early Monday after the boat broke down outside the French port of Boulogne-sur-Mer, authorities said. The car ferry, owned by the British company Falcon-Sea, was carrying a shipment of trucks to the British port of Folkestone when it broke down in heavy seas about 7:15 a.m. (0615 GMT), port authorities said. All of the passengers and several members of the crew were evacuated soon after. No injuries were reported. Authorities were waiting for the arrival of a tug boat to bring the vessel under control.

Two killed, more missing in Swiss avalanche

EVOLENE, Switzerland (AP) — Two people were killed and about 10 others were missing after two avalanches in a valley of the southern Swiss Alps, police said Monday. The avalanches hit Sunday evening, sweeping away several chalets, state police said. Two people were found dead under the snow. One girl survived with a broken leg, according to police spokesman early this morning due to a high risk of further avalanches in the area about 177 kilometres from the area hit by the avalanche who couldn't immediately be contacted. Were still missing. Some 200 people were evacuated from parts of the Val d'Herens and the upper part of the valley was closed off. Authorities told those who stayed behind in Evolene not to leave their homes.

World
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SYDNEY (AP) — Far
Xanana rebel Leader
Monday, as world and
Australian Foreign Affairs
Minister Alexander Downer
to support a peacekeeping
force in the troubled terri

Cambodia, under house
detention after being moved
from jail last month, is to
be held in prison Thursday.
"We'll ask for the foreign
minister and the Australian
government to help us set
up in the troubled terri

Pardon fo

MANILA (AP) — Philippines
President Joseph Estrada
resigned the offices of 50 jailed
Communist guerrillas Monday
and deployed more than 3,000
troops to track down rebel units
and other security officials.

The new People's army (NPA)
and its splinter arm, Brigadier
General Vicente Orellana, Captain
Edgar Montenegro, and police
chief Inspector Roberto Bernal to
turn the pressure on the govern
ment to restore stalled peace
talks.

"We are about to resume
negotiations with the government
but we held it because of this
incident of kidnapping," Estrada
told reporters after the police offi
cer was abducted Sunday.

"After this incident that hap
pened, we have to rethink," added
Estrada, referring to the govern
ment's stated aim to seek a politi

World News

South Korea to grant mass amnesty

SEOUL (AFP) — South Korea said Monday it would unconditionally free the world's longest-serving political detainee, Woo Yong-Gak, and 16 other long-term prisoners under a sweeping amnesty of nearly 9,000 people.

The country's most dramatic pardon was timed to coincide with the first anniversary in power of President Kim Dae-Jung, a former political prisoner who has vowed to improve South Korea's much-criticised human rights record.

Justice Minister Park Sang-Cheon conceded Seoul had bowed to international pressure by agreeing to free the 17 as part of the anniversary amnesty which will benefit a total of 8,812 people.

"We decided to release Woo Yong-Gak and 16 other long-term prisoners on humanitarian grounds to meet calls from Amnesty International and other groups for their release," he said.

The move is aimed at creating "greater national harmony" and helping economic recovery in South Korea which plunged into a major financial crisis in December 1997, the minister added.

Woo, 71, will walk free from a prison south of Seoul Thursday after serving 41 years of a life sentence for espionage, making him the world's longest-serving prisoner of conscience, according to Amnesty International.

Rights groups had demanded the release of the 17 — who have served between 30 and 41 years of their life sentences — by waiving a condition that they sign a disputed oath of obedience to South Korea's laws.

Park said 1,508 prisoners would be paroled on the anniversary of Kim's inauguration.

A further 7,292 people, including those convicted of petty offences such as traffic violations and economic infractions, will have their rights restored.

The 17, convicted under earlier regimes of spying for North Korea or of having Communist sympathies, are the highlight of the par-

don, which also benefits some trade unionists jailed for inciting illegal strikes and protests.

Crucially, the president waived the requirement for political prisoners to sign an oath of obedience to laws, including the draconian National Security Law (NSL) which bans the display of any pro-North Korean sentiment.

The justice minister also indicated the 17 elderly and mostly sickly convicts may be allowed the rare opportunity to cross over to the Communist North after their release.

The two Koreas, which share the world's last cold war frontier, have remained technically at war since their 1950-53 conflict.

The 17 men — aged between 54 and 71 — missed out on two amnesties last year when they refused to sign the oath, which they see as an infringement of their freedom of speech.

Amnesty International has demanded their release; the abolition of the oath and the repeal of the NSL, saying more than 250 people had been arrested under it since Kim came to power.

Kim spent around eight years in jail in the 1970s and 1980s as an outspoken critic of the military dictatorships of the time. He was sentenced to death in 1980 on charges of sedition.

But while the long-awaited release of the last long-term prisoners of conscience was welcomed by their families and foreign analysts, there was anger that more than 300 other political prisoners remain behind bars.

"This is insufficient," said Nam Kyu-Sun, of prisoners' family group Minkahyup, as the group staged a noisy protest in Seoul.

"We are disappointed because only 41 political prisoners of a total of 302 will be released. We demand that the government release all other political prisoners without any conditions."

Diplomats said the move was "praiseworthy and overdue," but warned further arrests under the NSL could set back the progress.

Former chief minister

Laloo Prasad Yadav, whose ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal government was dismissed in Bihar, set the tone when several of his supporters rushed into the well of the house shouting, "down with this autocratic government" moments after the session opened. The house was adjourned hastily, but as scheduled.

The main opposition Congress party has not made it clear if it will support imposition of federal rule in Bihar, an eastern state where a series of massacres of lower caste Hindus forced Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to dismiss the state government.

The decision will have to be ratified by a simple majority vote in parliament in the face of stiff opposition by several parties.

Former chief minister

announced it would withdraw from the government because of its refusal to roll back prices of subsidised essential goods. But the party said it would continue to vote with Vajpayee, meaning he can count on 276 votes. A simple majority is 272.

The 11-month-old Bharatiya Janata Party government Saturday presents its budget for the year 1999-2000. Several contentious economic issues including the proposed disinvestment of public sector companies and opening of the insurance sector will be hotly debated.

Opposition parties are also likely to criticise the government over the recent attacks on Christians and their property in several parts of India.

Principal among them is the imposition of federal rule in Bihar, an eastern state where a series of massacres of lower caste Hindus forced Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to dismiss the state government.

The decision will have to be ratified by a simple majority vote in parliament in the face of stiff opposition by several parties.

Former chief minister

keep high vigilance and put the state sovereignty and security on top priority," it said.

A Western diplomat told AFP the ongoing crackdown was "not unusual" as the government normally likes to tidy things up before the National People's Congress (NPC)."

One of the issues to be debated is the move to drop the term "counter-revolutionary" crime from its constitution and replace it with acts against state security.

"Some people block the state security organs tasked with implementing public affairs according to the law. Some people leak state security secrets and cause severe damage to the government's work," said the paper, the official voice of China's judiciary.

"These hostile elements always hide under a legal and open cover to carry out their secret and illegal activity."

"The special organs of the government should depend on the people to get their support and assistance to expose our enemies and give them no place to hide," the paper said.

"We should be aware that the situation is not safe and that hostile foreign forces never stop their activities of endangering state security," it added.

The editorial also urged China's leaders to pay closer attention to the country's security.

Authorities last December jailed the cdp leaders Beijing-based Xu Wenli, together with Wuhan activist Qin Yongmin and party founder Wang Youcai, for 13, 12 and 11 years respectively on charges of subversion.

Two Shanghai activists,

Han Lifu and Cai Guihua, who were involved with the banned democracy party were also detained late October and given nine-month "reeducation through labour" terms for suspected involvement with prostitutes.

The old crime of counter-revolutionary actions actually disappeared from the legal lexicon in 1997 but several dissidents sentenced under it are still being detained, human rights groups said.

Another outspoken activist

Peng Ming, remains in custody despite the lapse of a 15-day detention imposed on him since January 25 when he was held on charges of soliciting prostitutes.

Two Shanghai activists,

Han Lifu and Cai Guihua,

who were involved with the

banned democracy party were

also detained late October and

given nine-month "reeduca-

tion through labour" terms for

suspected involvement with

prostitutes.

Tokyo claimed title to the

disputed islands —

Etorofu, Kunashiri,

Shikotan and the Habomai

islets — in a treaty with

Russia in 1875. The Soviet

Union took the islands in

the closing days of World

War II, a move Japan has

protested ever since as illegal.

In November, President

Boris Yeltsin and Obuchi

signed a declaration pledg-

ing to seek an end to the

dispute over the kurils

before 2000. It gave no

indication of how that

might be resolved.

Japanese government

officials have reportedly

said a breakthrough is

unlikely any time soon.



Indian President K.R. Narayanan (right) walks with a ceremonial escort into parliament for his address to both houses of parliament in New Delhi. The crucial budget session of parliament opened today with Narayanan's address to lawmakers. Also seen are speaker of the lower house G.M.C. Balayogi (second left), Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (left) and, (centre), Parliament Affairs Minister R. Kumaramangalam (Reuters photo)

Indian government faces turbulent parliament session

NEW DELHI: India (AP) — India's parliament opened Monday amid cacophony and slogan shouting, offering a glimpse of what the session has in store for the shaky coalition government whose wafer-thin majority will be challenged by a series of controversial issues.

Principal among them is the imposition of federal rule in Bihar, an eastern state where a series of massacres of lower caste Hindus forced Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to dismiss the state government.

The decision will have to be ratified by a simple majority vote in parliament in the face of stiff opposition by several parties.

Former chief minister

immediate independence. Gusmao said he would also like an Australian consul in East Timor.

If I can ask for the existence of a new consul in East Timor it may help us, especially as the relationship between Darwin people and the Timorese has been set up a long time ago," he said.

Gusmao was the only way in and out of Portuguese Timor and I hope the relationship between Australian

and Timorese will be improved.

"Darwin is a place where we can hope for food or medical supplies when it is necessary."

He said his move to house arrest had been viewed by Indonesia as solving some problems in relation to East Timor.

"I am quite happy knowing this development has made many people in and out of the country give it their attention."

the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (pp).

pp founder Jose Maria Sison told ddbb radio by telephone from his base in the Netherlands that Bernal and the two other captives were "targets of opportunity."

"The arrests of military and police officers is in line with the policy of the revolutionary movement to launch offensives, raids and ambushes," Sison said.

"We were not able to undertake these in the past years" because the movement was "devoted to mass work and pacification" of previous strategic mistakes, he added.

A small infantry unit was separately tracking down the police officer's abductors.

Estrada Monday described the abductions as "pure and simple treachery," and warned that "if something happens to General Obillo, then I think something serious will happen."

He did not elaborate.

Sison said the rebels' National Democratic Front Organisation was undertaking an "act of generosity" by offering negotiations to release the prisoners of war, and warned government intransigence could cause the captives "harm."

The pp is the armed wing of

India raves, Pakistan lukewarm on detente

NEW Delhi (R) — India raved Monday over its prime minister's goodwill visit to Pakistan, where the leaders of the nuclear-capable rivals agreed on steps to put relations on a safer foot.

But reactions were muted in Pakistan, which maintains that the bitter, decades-old dispute over the Himalayan region of Kashmir remains the core irritant in relations.

Indian newspapers said Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's weekend trip to Lahore on the maiden trip of a cross-border bus service marked a quantum leap towards easing mutual hostility.

"Ice is finally broken," the Times of India proclaimed in a banner headline that was echoed by several dailies.

Parliamentarians cheered as President K.R. Narayanan, in a state-of-the-nation address, said the two sides would work for pacts on far-reaching confidence-building measures.

Venkaiah Naidu, spokesman for Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (bjp), said the "entire country" was happy with the prime minister's visit to Pakistan.

The Lahore declaration

is a major breakthrough," he said.

"This trip has brought a sentimental change in the entire subcontinent."

Pakistan's media was more restrained. The Nation — which said India had typically focused on symptoms at the summit while Pakistan focused on the malaise — was the only one of the major English-language newspapers to run an editorial on the subject.

"It must be realised that if the fundamental issue of Kashmir is not resolved, the smaller issues cannot be resolved," said one Pakistani official just minutes before a joint news conference by the two prime ministers to unveil their agreements.

Vajpayee, keeping his comments brief, told the news conference that it was "much too early" to say what solution would emerge.

However, on his return to new Delhi, he said he had told Sharif that continued violence in Kashmir would make normalisation of relations difficult.

"I told him this kind of killing must stop," he told reporters, referring to the murder of nine Hindu villagers last week in the two-thirds of Kashmir ruled by India.

Pakistan, which rules the rest of Kashmir, denies India's charges that it arms and trains Kashmiri separatist militants.

Russia's foreign minister says talks on Kurils should continue

TOKYO (AP) — Russia's foreign minister denied reports that his country has given up on settling a territorial dispute with Japan by 2000, saying Monday that the two sides should continue to pursue a solution.

Japanese news reports quoted Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov as telling Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura Sunday that deal on the Kuril Islands by 2000 was not possible.

"We will continue to make our best efforts to conclude the treaty by resolving" the dispute by 2000, Kyodo news agency quoted Komura as saying.

Disagreement over the Kuril Islands, controlled by Russia but claimed by Japan, has kept Tokyo and Moscow from signing a treaty officially ending World War II.

Ivanov was in Japan for talks with government officials. He and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi met

Monday.

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Jordan Times

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Legitimate concern

ARAB-ISRAELI Knesset member Azmi Bishara, the leader of the National Democratic Alliance Party better known as Balad has stirred a hornet's nest in Israel recently when he questioned the Zionist nature of the state and its "racist" laws. "It's time for Israel to become a normal country for all its citizens and not be defined as a homeland for the world's Jews," Bishara said Saturday in a radio interview. "We must change the image and Zionist character of Israel and take into account that more than one million Arabs live in this country," added Bishara. It was Israeli Minister Michael Eitan who sounded the alarm first about Balad's platform and said that "a party which rejects the existence of the state of Israel is breaking the law and cannot put forward candidates for election."

In actual terms, what Balad's leader has said is exactly what several U.N. human rights bodies have been saying all along. Every time Israel submits a report to a U.N. human rights committee monitoring member states' adherence to principal human rights conventions, it is put to task on this very subject and repeatedly questioned about the legitimacy of calling itself a Jewish state with special and privileged treatment for Jewish people within Israel and in the diaspora.

Accordingly, what the National Democratic Alliance has voiced concern about is a legitimate international issue. Bishara cannot therefore be accused of breaking Israeli law when a similar concern is expressed internationally and by the very same global organisations which are mandated to monitor Israel's compliance with its treaty bodies.

The rule of thumb under binding international human rights law, is that states cannot be established on religious, ethnic or racial grounds. This is admittedly a vexing issue on which countries could be divided with reason. But no matter how the international community ultimately views this subject, it remains a legitimate issue for exploration and perusal. Bishara did the right thing by raising the issue. Moreover, Israel is de facto a bi-national state anyway since about a quarter of its population is non-Jewish. There will come a point in time when Israel will have to reckon juridically with this fact and amend its laws accordingly. Instead of condemning Balad's leader, the Israeli establishment should be gratified for the opportunity to air his views no matter how controversial they may appear to be and allow a full and thorough national debate over it, the sooner the better.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Taher Adwan said many people in the public and private sectors are enthusiastic about a two-day holiday, introduced by Prime Minister Fayed Tarawneh. Universities and schools adopted this holiday years ago, and its implementation proved without negative side effects. Adwan noted, asking what is preventing governmental and non-governmental organisations from changing? Jordan is a small country, where the productivity is limited and employment is not as in the developing countries, which have already adopted a two-day holiday, said the writer. Exceptional solutions could be set up for businesspersons and industrialists, who might have some fears about the issue, he added, suggesting that effectively facilitating financial, custom, investment and export regulation on Thursdays could help get rid of these fears. In fact, Adwan said, instead of reading, for example, most Jordanians use Fridays to sleep, pray and to eat "mansaf and have a barbecue," and thus, there is no real meaning in holidays. The writer said he is enthusiastic for the idea as it might shift society's idea about the weekend.

Al Dustour's Mazen Saket said the government's efforts to encourage investment, especially with recent Arab and international pledges to provide support, coincide with the country's general objectives to meet the current economic crisis. However, Saket added, these efforts have not considered priorities and the need to comprehensively solve the extensive economic crisis. Talk about encouraging investment, developing management, facilitating regulations and activating the role of some institutions in fact ignores the essence of the problem, the writer said. No doubt the government is aware that most of the industrial, agricultural, production and even tourist projects are facing real problems for many reasons. Saket noted, The private sector, its investment and projects are suffering from similar obstacles, which means, according to the writer, that the crisis is not related to privatisation. These facts require decision-makers to pay attention to the priorities and challenges in order to meet the problem. Saket said.

Wisdom or insolvency of the Arab state

THE PUBLICATION of the latest (1998) edition of the Unified Arab Economic Report (UAER) is the occasion for my annual bird's eye view of the economic condition of the Arab World, defined as all the member countries of the Arab League. As was the situation last year, the pan-Arab economic condition remains very mixed, rather erratic, and still very vulnerable, but with the continuing good news of some positive trends. This report is published annually by four Arab institutions — the Arab Monetary Fund, the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, the League of Arab States, and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development — who should be commended for their good work.

The data in the 1998 UAER indicate two noteworthy trends: during the nearly two decades since the early 1980s, most macroeconomic indicators in the Arab World have been troubling, but a select few indicators have improved. Nevertheless, the Arab world remains defined by a wider context of a) general stress on the living conditions of most Arab families, and b) the fragmentation of the Arab population into a small group of relatively wealthy, educated Arabs who can take care of their families, and a large group of relatively poor, professionally underachieving Arabs whose fundamental family needs and future remain vulnerable. The data

reveals the following trends for the entire Arab World in the period 1980-1997:

- The Arab population increased by 60 per cent, from 165 million to 264 million, but the annual population growth rate has declined in the same period from 4 to 2.5 per cent.

- Total Arab gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices has increased by an annual average of over six per cent in the last three years, reaching \$599 billion in 1997. This is an increase of 37 per cent since 1980 — compared to 60 per cent population increase over the same period.

- Thus, the economic measure or wealth of the average Arab person (per capita Arab gross domestic product) increased to \$2268 in 1997, the third consecutive year of increase. But because the Arab population over the medium term has been growing faster than the Arab economy, individual wealth (per capita Arab gross domestic product) still shows a net decline of 13% from the high of \$2612 registered in 1980. (In real terms, accounting for inflation, the retreat was much worse).

(We should be cautious about the short-term increase of 1996-97, though, because it was largely due to rising oil prices; those prices have now plunged. The average oil price of \$16 per barrel in 1994 increased to \$20 per barrel in 1996 and 1997, but this winter it has been under \$10 per barrel — so the total income figures for the Arab

world should plummet in 1998 and 1999, given that oil income still represents over 55 per cent of total government income in the entire Arab world).

- Arab oil income continues to fluctuate, registering \$118 b. in 1997, compared to \$99 b. in 1995, \$87 b. in 1994, and \$58 b. in 1987. Arab oil production continues to increase, reaching 19.5 million barrels per day in 1997, compared to an average of under 15 million bpd a decade earlier.

- Total Arab exports of \$177 b. in 1997 and imports of \$147 b. both represent modest annual increases; the trade surplus rose from \$12 b. in 1994 to \$30 b. in 1997. Total Arab reliance on imported food remains high and largely unchanged, at over \$22 billion annually in recent years.

- Fiscal trends are one of the brighter areas of the Arab economic condition. Total government expenditures as a percentage of Arab GDP are steady at 36 per cent, significantly below the average of 44 per cent a decade earlier. Arab spending on defence and security remains relatively high and unchanged, averaging 27 per cent of total current expenditures during the past decade; but spending on social services also remains substantial, averaging 25 per cent over the past decade.

- Official Arab financial reserves continue to rise, reaching \$74 b. in 1997 — a 55 per cent increase over the average level of a decade ago.

View from the Fourth Circle



Rami G. Khouri

Arab government budget deficits also continue to drop sharply, from \$69 b. in 1991 to \$16 b. in 1996 and \$11 b. in 1997; correspondingly, government budget deficits as a percentage of GDP have declined from 18% in 1991 to 2.2% in 1997 — a cumulative and impressive 80 per cent decline in the past decade.

- Arab published foreign debt remains stubbornly high — and is also probably deceptively under-reported in most Arab countries. It was \$157 b. in 1996, representing a 36 per cent increase over the previous decade. Annual debt service was steady at around \$12.5 b. in 1996, and debt interest payments alone were also steady at some \$5.6 b. Foreign debt remains at around 110 per cent of total exports, not significantly changed in the past decade. Debt service as

a percentage of exports has declined slightly in the past decade, from 11 to 8 per cent of exports.

- Arab governments still seem to have trouble taxing their own people: tax revenues account for just 29 per cent of Arab government revenues (even more problematic is that government revenues from direct taxation of income and profits remain stagnant at around just eight per cent of total government revenues). Research is sorely needed here to determine if the Arab state's weak capacity to tax its own people reflects a problem of logistics or political legitimacy.

These aggregate figures continue to reveal wide and erratic swings in many indicators, pointing out chronic Arab economic vulnerabilities in fields such as foreign trade, government income, foreign debt, taxation, food security, and other sectors that are crucial to the well-being of families and countries. But there is also some good news for the Arab people to celebrate, especially in terms of increasingly responsible fiscal behaviour by governments. We do not know, however, if some of the positive trends are a function of wisdom or insolvency on the part of our public authorities. Both of these attributes are common in the Arab World. It would be useful for Arab research institutions to take these figures and mine them further for their full political, economic and strategic meaning.

The strength of the euro and global challenges

By Jacques Chirac

THE ECONOMIC powerhouses of the United States and the European Union (EU) exert a decisive influence on world growth. Our two entities account for 57 per cent of the wealth produced in the world. This places a special responsibility upon us, and we need an intensive but trustful transatlantic dialogue if we are to gain balanced world growth. Let me be clear, we need to discuss a new global financial architecture, and I am happy to be going to Washington to talk about this with America's highest officials and the leaders of international financial institutions.

The start of 1999 witnessed an outstanding event with the birth of the euro. For the first time in history, countries have instituted a single currency by an act of peaceful and democratic political will. The nations of Europe wanted the euro in order to ensure economic growth and job creation, and to work toward a common future, not to compete with the dollar, as some have claimed. America has everything to gain from the strong, stable and open Europe that we are trying to achieve with the euro. It is an instrument of stability as it does away with currency volatility within the euro zone. This stability promotes trade within the EU as well as between Europe and its major partners, the United States foremost among them.

The euro will also naturally stimulate competition, since it will spur greater efficiency. That will benefit American companies wanting to expand their presence in Europe. For the world at large, the euro will boost trade and economic growth.

This is why France has adopted the euro with confidence: we're well aware that we will need to become more competitive in order to be an ever more attractive, investor-friendly place. It will take several years for the euro to become a reserve currency. But its birth has already changed the international monetary situation. Henceforward, the dollar

and the euro, alongside the yen, will be the benchmark currencies for the great majority of financial transactions, and their exchange rates with one another will dominate the world economic scene.

The United States and the EU form the most stable area in the world, thanks to their implementation of sound economic policies. But this stability on both sides of the Atlantic stands in stark contrast to the instability prevailing elsewhere. This disparity ought to put us on our guard: it would be a mistake to think that our growth can be sustained independently of growth in other parts of the world.

Consequently, it is up to the United States, Europe and Japan to preserve a world environment conducive to growth, at a time when many emerging countries are making considerable efforts to overcome their difficulties. Growth depends on stability between our currencies. This stability should not be achieved by artificial means that prevent the necessary adjustments from taking place or imperil another crucial factor, price stability. Nor can it be achieved without a substantial strengthening of cooperation between us. We, therefore, need to look for the means and procedures to achieve currency stability, continuously and on a commonly accepted basis.

France and Germany share identical views on this subject. And during the Japanese prime minister's recent visit to Paris, a community of thinking with our Japanese partners emerged. I hope to find the same convergence of views in the United States during my visit.

We live in a fragile world, as repeated crises in Mexico, Asia, Russia and now Brazil have demonstrated.

To be sure, the financial community has acted swiftly to deal with the immediate consequences of these crises, thanks in particular to the strong intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the financial support of the Group of Seven (G7) leading industrialised nations. Europe fully contributed to this, alongside the United States,

making available its full share of the funding needed to tackle the crises. Europe has not remained complacent nor inactive.

But, beyond these short-term responses, we need more ambitious ones.

Any such undertaking will take time. This is yet another reason to make haste, for the human, social and political consequences of notably these financial disorders are taking a heavy toll in many countries. We must not forget that democracy takes root in economic development, and that loss of confidence in the future creates fertile soil for demagogues.

I am convinced that the foundations laid at Bretton Woods 50 years ago, which long underpinned the economic prosperity of the world, must now be adapted to today's fast-changing global economy. We know what risks we must avoid. We must resist the temptation to withdraw behind national barriers, the siren song of trade and financial protectionism and the appeal of unilateral action. We must eschew ideological responses and focus on concrete solutions, to be arrived at through concerted action embracing all concerned. Our purpose should be to provide a global response to the financial crises sweeping the world — a response that encompasses political and social aspects, as well as economic ones.

The heads of state and government of G-7 have gotten the ball rolling politically by recognising the need to rebuild the international financial architecture. Now, we must define with precision what is needed and implement the key reforms that would strengthen international monetary and financial relations and make them more conducive to world growth and development.

We already know the direction we should be working in: We must ensure that states and international financial institutions become as transparent as necessary, disseminating the required information. We must also encourage an orderly liberalisation of the flow of capital, and improve market regulation by adopting a

genuine "highway code" for capital flows, whether they emanate from hedge funds or offshore centres. We must also increase the political accountability of the IMF by turning its Interim Committee into an accountable body. We must, furthermore, involve the private sector more effectively in the solution of crises. Lastly, and above all, we must make sure that we take the social dimensions of the crises more fully into account. For example, at the G-7 summit in Cologne in June, we should come up with a definitive solution to the debt problem of the poorest countries. We also need to boost our official development aid.

We have made a start on all of this; solutions are beginning to emerge. But much still remains to be done, and swiftly.

The G-7 heads of state are well aware of their responsibilities in these areas. I have discussed these issues with U.S. President Bill Clinton on several occasions. I know he too shares this sense of urgency. This should be the year in which the necessary reforms are implemented.

Building on the decisions to be made at the forthcoming G7 summit, France has proposed convening a summit of the member countries of the IMF Interim Committee, if possible in the fall. And why not in Paris? This summit would solemnly approve these reforms and chart, with the assent of all, a new course toward a better-managed globalisation "with a human face."

The writer is president of France. This article first appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Letters to the editor

A cleaner Amman

A CAUSE worthy of mention and acknowledgement.

Thank you for a good article about those who deserve most credit for our clean city (The men in orange overlooked, forgotten and abused, yet vital to Amman, JT, Feb. 22nd, page 3)

It is high time that laws about littering be implemented.

Reem Habayeb
Amman

Beware BCM's

IT IS a source of comfort to know that there are other people who think like me. Out of Order ('The bigger they come, the harder they fall', Feb. 13) was just brilliant. However, there was just one thing which puzzled me. In the list of potential candidates for the Unnamed State, he mentioned the U.K. as being non-European. Well, I happened to be born in England and during my school days I was under the illusion that the U.K. was part of Europe. Then I thought again: Nowadays British prime ministers seem more anxious to appease the U.S. government than their fellow Europeans: united they stand against any thought of revoking the embargo against Iraq and all together into such ventures as "Desert Fox" as though the desert abounded with foxes! How distasteful to give such names to bombing campaigns which kill people! The euro and monetary union? Just forget it! (for the moment).

However, I plead with Jordan to proceed with caution on privatisation, especially television. As far as I can see, the only thing commercial television succeeds in increasing is the level of trash! I remember once an Italian acquaintance asked me (I think he was only half joking) "What is the difference between a washing machine and a television?" I promptly replied "One washes clothes and the other washes brains" (correct answer!) Also I beg my Jordanian friends to be careful of the 'Big Corporate

Monsters' (BCM's) prowling around ready to engulf you with messages of (their) salvation.

Janet Anderson
Milan
Italy

A happy customer

I AM AN English lady staying in Aqaba.

Before I left England I was besieged by family and friends who tried (without success) to prevent me travelling to the Middle East.

"You are not seriously thinking of going," they exclaimed, followed by a series of do's and don'ts.

You won't be able to eat anything, was followed by don't drink the water, wash all fruit and if you must eat salad wash it yourself in boiled water etc. etc.

I have totally ignored all these dire warnings and have thoroughly enjoyed everything. In fact not in years I felt so fit.

The sweetness and simplicity of your unspoiled country and its people have filled me with a peace and happiness that I have not felt for many years.

I have been invited to spice shops to drink mint tea and into others for coffee. Even the veiled ladies have smiled at me and encouraged their children to return my wave.

How lovely! I have travelled the world and seldom felt so safe.

I am a poet, and I am here for four weeks to complete a poetry book to be published in America.

I intend to come back again and again to lovely Jordan. I have been to Wadi Rum and still have Petra to see. Lucky me!

Dulcie Levene
(Dorset poet)
International Society of Poets
'Poet of the Year'
Washington

Customs and industry

A FEW months ago when the new government arrived we heard more promises that the customs duties levied on raw materials that goes into manufacturing will gradually be lowered

ENVIRONMENT

Genetically modified food has become a multi-billion transnational industry. However, recent findings suggest that such food can seriously undermine the environment and the human immune system

'Trust me, I'm a genetic engineer'

By Gwynne Dyer

"We simply do not know the long-term consequences for human health and the wider environment (of genetically modified crops)... If something does go badly wrong, we will be faced with the problem of clearing up a kind of pollution which is self-perpetuating. I am not convinced that anyone has the first idea of how this could be done."

— Charles, Prince of Wales, June 1998

LESS THAN a year ago, that was about as tough as the opposition to genetically modified (GM) foods got, in Britain or anywhere else: genteel expressions of concern by people essentially without power, many of whom were seen as cranks. ("If 'Big Ears' is against it, it can't be all bad.") Meanwhile the GM juggernaut rolled on unimpeded, bearing Monsanto, Zeneca, Novartis and the other major bio-technology companies towards a very lucrative Promised Land.

How distant that all seems now. Ten days ago (12 February), the first evidence of health problems connected with GM foods that was even remotely plausible surfaced in Britain. It is fairly flimsy evidence, one must say, but it has unleashed a frenzy of media criticism that had been just waiting to happen, and it's now virtually certain that no commercial GM crops will be grown in Britain for years. It is quite likely that this will trigger similar revolts in the rest of Europe, and reinforce the growing Third World resistance to the spread of GM technologies there. It is even possible that the protests, boycotts, and demands for segregation and clear labelling of GM products will spread back to North America, where criticism hitherto has been extremely muted.

To Bob Shapiro, CEO of Monsanto and erstwhile Master of the Universe, it must all feel very unfair. After all, nothing specific has been proved about the dangers of GM foods either to consumers or to the environment. He even claims to be an environmentally sensitive 'green' himself, and looks hurt when anybody else questions his motives. But there is certainly a strong whiff of Nemesis about the proceedings.

When Shapiro took over as CEO of Monsanto four years ago, it was a middling-to-large agrochemical combine with a huge problem: the patent for the highly successful weed-killer that provided the bulk of its income, Round-up, was due to expire soon. He came up with a brilliant solution.

It's already out there in the marketplace. Monsanto now sells seeds that are genetically engineered to be resistant to Round-up — which makes them very attractive to farmers, who can get a better yield for the same dose of herbicide. And just to make sure that they don't buy some cheap knock-off version of Round-up from a competitor, the seeds come with a contract obliging the farmer to buy Round-up from Monsanto. That's TWO profit centres where there used to be one, so now everybody loved him.

True, it meant that American consumers now had to eat these genetically modified (GM) foods, like it or not — and since the U.S. exports huge amounts of food, all sorts of foreigners had to eat them too. Moreover, Monsanto needed a lot of farmers to commit to Round-up Ready seeds before its patent on Round-up herbicide expired, so there wasn't too much time for lengthy trials to see whether its GM products were safe for the consumer and the environment. So Shapiro became one of the biggest contributors of 'soft money' to Bill Clinton's 1996 election campaign. Next thing you know, he's special trade adviser to the president. Getting GM products onto the shelves of American supermarkets was a no-brainer — the U.S. media are half-asleep, and the public doesn't seem to care what it eats so long as the portions are giant-size — and Canadian consumers didn't pose much of a problem either.

Europeans, on the other hand, were deeply suspicious of these 'Frankenstein foods,' mainly because they had just been through a major health scare over Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis ('mad cow disease'), which is transmitted from cattle to humans through the consumption of infected beef. Ten years ago all the experts, apart from a few maverick scientists, were sure that BSE could not cross the species barrier and infect people — but the alarmist mavericks were right. Which explains, according to John Durant, professor of public understanding at Imperial College, London, why "people in Europe (are now) very sensitive to new technologies in the food supply industry, and very wary of scientists and government attempts to reassure them."

Monsanto dealt with European fears (or rather, tried to override them) by the strategy of systematically mixing GM and non-GM products together before exporting them. When the Europeans objected to this, demanding clear segregation and labelling of GM foods, Shapiro got his good buddy Clinton to threaten a trade war, and they quickly caved in. (Leaked New Zealand government documents from early 1998 show a similar pattern, with Washington threatening to pull out of a potential free trade agreement if New Zealand went ahead with its plans for labelling and testing genetically modified foods.)

Late 1998, in retrospect, was probably the high noon of Monsanto's incipient world empire. Thirty per cent of the U.S. soya bean crop and 15 per cent of its corn was grown

from Round-up Ready seed last year, with both figures set to double in the next two years. An orgy of acquisitions, including corn-seed producer Dekalb Genetics Corp., grain-trading and processed foods giant Cargill, and Unilever's crop-breeding unit, which specialises in hybrid wheats, turned Monsanto into the world's dominant biotech company, with an estimated worth of \$35 billion (up sixfold in five years).

'In [India] the farmers' association launched 'Operation Cremate Monsanto' and burned out two experimental fields of GM [genetically modified] cotton'

Monsanto also bought up Delta Pine and Land last year for \$4 billion, thus acquiring its 'terminator seed technology': a genetic modification that prevents seeds harvested from GM plants from germinating if replanted. This is a technology without much relevance in North America, where most farmers buy all their seed anyway, but it was vital to Monsanto's plans in the Third World. It also turned out to be a flashpoint for resistance.

"By peddling suicide seeds, the biotechnology multi-nationals will lock the world's poorest farmers into a new form of genetic serfdom," explains Emma Must, campaigns officer of the World Development Movement. "Currently 80 per cent of crops in developing countries are grown using farm-saved seed. Being unable to save seeds from sterile crops could mean the difference between surviving and going under. More precisely, it would speed the consolidation of small farms into the hands of those with the money to engage in industrialised agribusiness" — which generally means higher profits, but less employment and lower yields per acre.

"The terminator gene will pose a serious threat to Indian agriculture," warned Babagouda Patil, Indian minister of rural

That memorandum ignited a firestorm of protest in Britain that has already forced the government to postpone authorising the first commercial GM crops for at least a year, until autumn 2000, and may soon lead to a 3-year moratorium. Last week, the European Commission blocked the sale or growth anywhere in Europe of two GM cottons that Monsanto already markets freely in the U.S., its third and fourth decisions in a row blocking the release into the environment of a genetically modified organism.

To make matters worse, on Wednesday Monsanto was fined over \$25,000 by a British court for 'genetic pollution': inadequate barriers between an experimental field of GM oilseed rape and adjacent fields of natural crops. The free ride in public opinion is over — but what are the real risks?

The direct fears can be summed up under three headings: 'Frankenstein foods,' genetic pollution, and 'Green Concrete.' In each case, the anxieties arise not so much from what is known, but rather from what is NOT yet known about the possible consequences of this massive and ultra-rapid move into GM crops. The latter two concerns have been relatively easy for the biotechnology industry to dismiss, since they tend to divide people along familiar lines, with the 'pragmatists' usually outnumbering the greens. If the end result of adding alien genes to create crops that are resistant to herbicides and insect infestations is fields where there are no other plants, few insects, and so hardly any birds, just the GM monoculture (the 'Green Concrete' phenomenon)... well, modern intensive agriculture has already travelled a long way down that road. And most people never see the fields anyway.

Some goes, pretty much, for 'genetic pollution.' Scientists and environmentalists may worry about the risk that the altered genes that confer resistance to herbicides might get into other plants as well, creating a generation of 'super-weeds' that require bigger and bigger doses of weed-killer to control. It was Monsanto's failure to ensure adequate safeguards against that danger (a 6-metre gap between GM and normal crops) that got it fined by a British court this week. But once again, it is too obscure and distant a danger to mobilise popular opinion — whereas any suggestion that GM foods are a threat to human health is (in PR terms) an absolute killer.

The tests that have now caused such alarm were begun in 1996 Pusztai, an international authority on lectins (natural poisons that plants produce as a defence against predators).



The days when vegetables were supposed to be good for you may be over soon (file photo)

development — and in Karnataka state the farmers' association launched 'Operation Cremate Monsanto' and burned out two experimental fields of GM cotton. Meanwhile in Britain, Arpad Pusztai, a professor at the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen, reported in April that an experiment in which laboratory rats were fed genetically modified potatoes had caused weakened immune systems and damage to vital organs.

The protests from the Third World, however, were drowned out by a major advertising campaign claiming that GM crops were the answer to the threat of global famine. This is tripe, as the world currently has plenty of food — the problem is getting it into the hands of the poor — but it sounded much better than saying that GM foods would raise the profits of biotech firms and farmers in the rich countries.

As for the inconvenient British researcher, he was forced into retirement after only three days, while various experts came forward to say that his research was 'muddled.' On the surface, the plan for global domination still seemed to be unfolding serenely.

And then, on 12 February, a group of twenty scientists from 13 countries published a memorandum demanding the immediate rehabilitation of researcher Pusztai, and expressing support for his tentative conclusion, funded by a \$2.4 million grant from the British government's Scottish Office, that GM potatoes had damaged the kidneys, thymus, spleen and gut of laboratory rats after only ten days of feeding trials, and weakened their immune systems.

Competing against 28 other tenders, he won an official contract to conduct research into the human nutritional consequences of GM foods — which, as a former senior Scottish Office official involved in commissioning the project recently explained to the 'Guardian' newspaper, were receiving "little regard" at the time.

Pusztai, a respected scientist with 35 years at the Rowett Research Institute and 270 scientific papers to his credit, probably won the competition because of his expertise with lectins, which are natural candidates for genetic manipulation since they confer protection against insects. He had the biology department of Durham University prepare a GM potato strain that incorporated genetic instructions for the manufacture of lectins, and began feeding it to rats. At the same time, of course, he fed another 'control' group of rats with normal potatoes that were simply spliced with lectins.

All the rats suffered some damage, since lectins are poisonous — but the stunted growth and damage to the immune system was worse in those given the GM potatoes. Moreover, the researchers began to suspect that the culprit was not the lectin gene itself, but rather the 'virus promoter,' the 'light switch' which GM companies use to activate the inserted genes. And the particular promoter used in the potatoes was the cauliflower mosaic virus — which has already been used in most GM products on the market.

These were highly provisional and preliminary results, but Pusztai (by no means a dogmatic opponent of genetic engineering)

was alarmed enough to seek further research funding — which was refused. He was given permission by the Institute's director, Philip James, to speak to British television programmes in January of last year, and again in April. On the latter occasion, Pusztai said he would not eat GM foods himself and that it was "very, very unfair to use our fellow citizens as guinea pigs."

In the ensuing outcry, James defended Pusztai on the first day — and then on the second day suspended him, condemned his research techniques, made him sign a gagging order, and forced him to retire. An audit report conducted by the Rowett Institute last August, while exonerating Pusztai of the charge that his research methodology was bad, did not link GM potatoes to any health risks. But Pusztai, who was then given access again to his own research data, strongly reconfirmed his findings.

There the matter rested until 12 February, when 20 scientists (including two who had worked at the Rowett Institute) published their letter of support for Pusztai. And then all hell broke loose in the British media.

One signatory, Ronald Finn, a former president of the British Society of Allergy and Environmental Medicine, told a London press conference: "We in the U.K. have just had a very narrow escape following the epidemic of mad cow disease. I think we have probably got away with it. We have been warned once... and we should be extremely careful to monitor any further major change in food technology."

Another signatory, Jonathan Rhodes, professor of medicine at Liverpool University, went further. "One key problem that keeps coming back time and again is that regulation of food is nothing like as strict as regulation of drugs. And when you start tinkering around with the genetic structure of food, you have to move towards thinking of food products as pharmaceuticals."

So what happens now that the cat is comprehensively out of the bag? For there is not just a lot of money at stake here. There is also the conviction on the part of various Western governments, most notably those of the United States, Canada and Britain, that GM technologies will bring them enormous trade benefits in the next century, and therefore must suffer no major restriction or delay.

In Britain, GM crops are probably a lost cause, even though Prime Minister Tony Blair backs them enthusiastically. He does so because biotechnology firms contribute generously to the Labour Party, because his friend Clinton phones him up from Washington to lean on him, and because he genuinely believes that GM technologies will assist in a British post-industrial renaissance. Government officials and ministers have met with companies involved in GM foods 81 times since Labour was elected in 1997 (23 with Monsanto alone), and more than \$22 million has been earmarked in aid for British biotech firms.

As part of the damage control exercise, Blair even let it be known that he himself ate GM foods and believed them to be safe (though the spokesman refused to be drawn on whether the Blair children also ate them). But it won't help. The British government is now in full retreat before an aroused public opinion, and neither threats nor blandishments from Washington will keep it in line, for now it is becoming a question of political survival.

Recent decisions in Strasbourg suggest that the tide in the rest of Europe is running in the same direction. Last week, the European Parliament voted to impose strict corporate liability and mandatory insurance on companies that release GM organisms into the environment, and for much stronger rules on the segregation and labelling of GM foods.

In the United States, however, turning the tide is much more difficult. Monsanto, which gives large donations to both political parties and to congressmen on food safety committees, has become a virtual retirement home for members of the Clinton administration.

Trade and environmental protection administrators and other Clinton appointees have left to take up lucrative positions on Monsanto's board, while Monsanto and other biotech executives pass through the same revolving door to take up positions in the administration and its regulatory bodies. (Clinton has even praised Monsanto by name in a State of the Union Address.)

"The Food and Drug Administration," says Betty Martini of the consumer group Mission Possible, "is so closely linked to the biotech industry now that it could be described as their Washington branch office." And the industry has got its way: U.S. law requires that no GM foods be labelled as such, and fourteen states have even been persuaded to pass virtually identical 'veggie libel' laws preventing the spreading of false and damaging information about food.

So whether GM foods are safe or not, most Americans will be eating them for a long time to come. They will have difficulty even



Tasty! But are we being conned? (file photo)

in finding out which foods contain GM products (though most processed foods already do), and they may discover that publicly questioning the safety of any specific GM food leads to a close encounter with a large firm of lawyers. In the rest of the world, however, the backlash is growing fast.

This week in Cartagena, Colombia, diplomats from 175 countries open the final stage of negotiations for a Biosafety Protocol that is meant to regulate the movement of GM products between countries.

The biotech industries, with strong backing from the U.S. and Canadian governments, want a weak treaty that gives no country the right to keep GM products out in order to shelter its population from the social and economic impact of industrialised, capital-intensive forms of agriculture, or even on health and environmental grounds.

But the Europeans are starting to waver,

'There is not just a lot of money at stake... there is also the conviction on the part of various Western governments, most notably those of the U.S., Canada and Britain, that GM technologies will bring them enormous trade benefits in the next century, and therefore must suffer no major restriction or delay'

and large numbers of NGOs are in Colombia to push for a protocol that gives countries the right to say no to the import and release of GM organisms, requires a full assessment of the possible effects on farmers' livelihoods as well as health and environmental impacts, and makes biotech multinationals responsible for the legal consequences (including compensation) if something goes wrong. And most of the Third World has already figured out what side it is on.

Whatever the real problems with GM foods, the strategy for their high-speed introduction throughout the world is shaping up as one of the great PR disasters of all time. Public suspicion outside North America is now reaching crippling levels, and the reason is not at all mysterious. It is because the biotech firms literally tried to shove the stuff down people's throats without giving them either choice or information.

In the words of Malcolm Walker, chairman of the British foodstore chain Iceland Foods (which has now banned all GM foods from its shelves), the U.S. food giants' tactic of mixing GM and ordinary soya to make sure it was all contaminated was "secretive, devious, and a terrible thing to do. People want food they can trust."

The writer is a London-based independent journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries.

Egypt's economy minister urges boosting exports and savings

CAIRO (R) — Egypt needs to increase exports and boost domestic savings if it is to generate economic growth and create jobs for a rising labour force. Economy Minister Youssef Boutros-Ghali said.

The country had largely escaped the slowdowns in other emerging markets because of its low exposure to international trade, but would not be able to sustain this position, he told a semi-

nar organised by Egypt's Economic Research Forum. "We cannot continue to generate growth...through domestically generated investment and income," Boutros-Ghali said.

"Exports have to grow if they are to generate the employment that is going to match the new entrants in the labour force for the next 10 years," he stressed.

Egypt's exports for the first quarter of fiscal 1998/9

(July-June) were \$1.2 billion, against \$5.1 billion in 1997/8 and \$5.3 billion the year before.

Boutros-Ghali said Egyptian savers should be pampered by providing them with assets, risk profiles and liquidity.

"If we do that I am convinced we can increase our savings ratio from the present 18-19 per cent to at least 22 per cent," he said.

Egypt's textile, food-pro-

cessing and household appliance makers could start penetrating export markets this year or next, and the country could also export computer software and financial services, Mahmoud Mohieldin, senior adviser to the minister, told Reuters at the seminar.

Expanding non-oil exports could also offset a decline in oil export revenue due to depressed world oil prices, he said.

Daley: U.S. '99 trade deficit will be \$200b

DAVOS, Switzerland (AFP) — The U.S. could have a trade deficit of some \$200 billion this year, U.S. Commerce Secretary William Daley has said. "The trade deficit is rising very quickly and substantially." The deficit "is causing us political concern" even if the United States remains committed to open markets, he said, predicting a deficit of around \$200 billion for this year.

ADB chief: Banking, market reforms key to Asia's painful recovery

MANILA (AP) — Asia's recovery from financial crisis will start this year, but reduced capital inflows will rein in the region's economic growth, the new president of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said.

Tadao Chino, who assumed office last month, also said drastic reforms in the banking sector, currency and capital markets held the key to Asia's recovery.

"I think Asian countries have hit the bottom already. Outlook for Asia in 1999 depends on the fate of currency reform initiatives and the mood in the capital markets," he told a news conference.

"Sharp reductions in private capital to Asia will keep the overall supply of foreign exchange to the region well below the pre-crisis level.

That's the problem," said Chino, a former Japanese vice minister for international finance.

In the region's recovery, restructuring and recapitalisation of banks and firms will be high on the priority list," he said.

"I have a very strong feeling now that in order to revitalise the economies, we have to revitalise the financial sector first," he added, citing the experience of the Japanese economy.

The turmoil, which began in July 1997, has unmasked fundamental problems in the region's financial and banking sectors glossed over by decades of economic boom.

Chino said the bank will make the necessary assistance for capital and bond market development as well

as for a "transparent, well supervised banking system."

ADB has been asked to manage an "Asian financial crisis support facility" as part of a \$30 billion Japanese aid package for ailing economies, which could be used, among others, as a guarantee for bond issuances, he said.

Chino said he will pursue the policies of his predecessor, Mitsuru Sato, to make the bank a "broad-based development institution" but will take further steps to reduce poverty.

ADB is preparing a blueprint to reduce poverty in the face of the displacement caused by the Asian crisis but details of the strategy are still on the drawing board.

Lasting solutions would involve not just short term

but medium and long term measures to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared more equitably, he said.

"I would like to stress that the bank would make further efforts to reduce poverty because I believe poverty reduction is the overarching objective of the bank," added Chino.

"As the Asian crisis has been so severe, the provision of adequate social safety nets to the vulnerable population is critical in the short term," he said.

He added that China's \$145 billion in reserves in 1998 would give Beijing "a thick cushion to resist an attack."

Chino said the ADB must "find the necessary resources" to sustain its programmes but declined to confirm rumours that the bank would seek a doubling of its capital base to \$150 billion. He said the bank must first

strengthen its "stand-alone financial position" before a general capital increase can be discussed formally in the future.

The official also said he thought China was unlikely to devalue the yuan, because of its large foreign exchange reserves and balance of payment surplus in 1998.

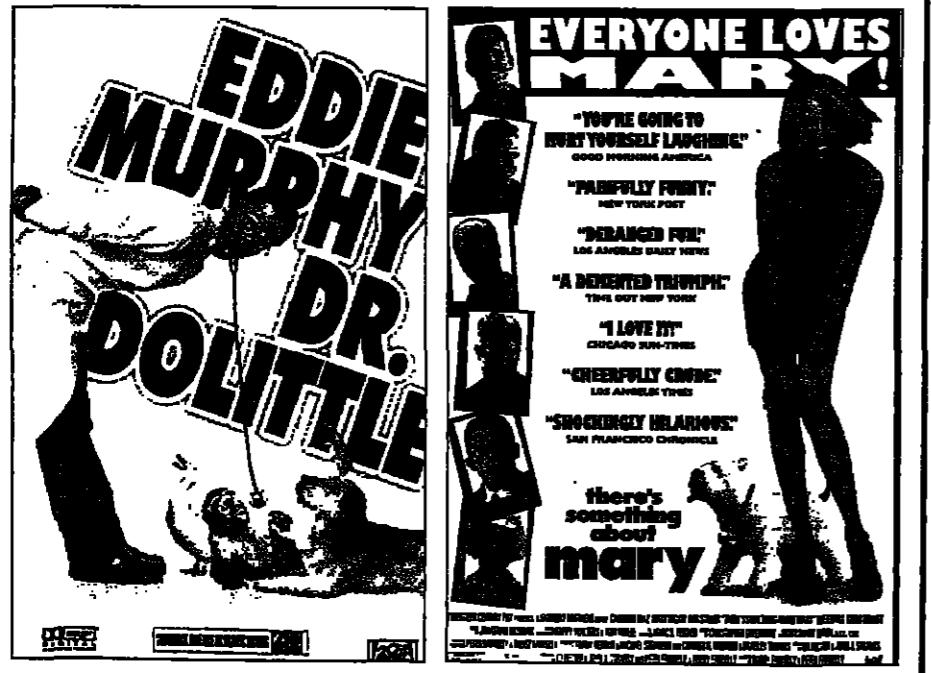
China's determination to

maintain the exchange rate on the yuan had a very stabilising influence on the currency market. There is not likely much pressure to devalue," he said.

He added that China's \$145 billion in reserves in 1998 would give Beijing "a thick cushion to resist an attack."

ADB is subscribed to by 57 member economies, with Japan and the United States as its biggest shareholders. Japan has traditionally held the presidency, while Washington gets one of three vice presidential seats.

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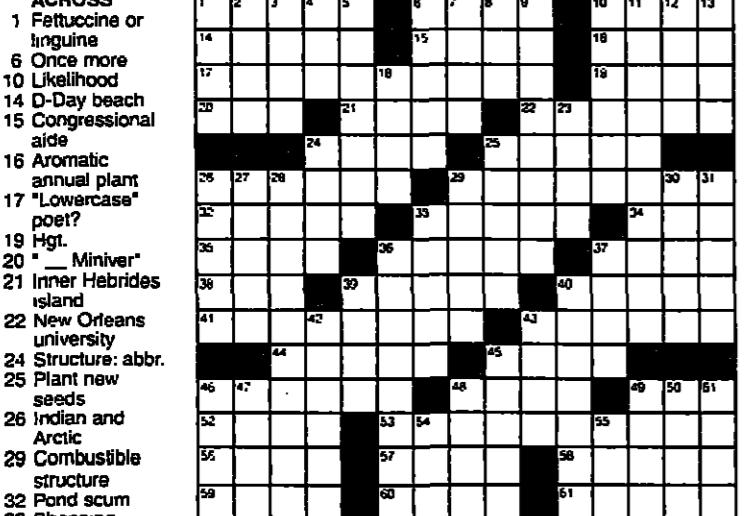
DIPLOMAS were awarded this week to the Arts Centre students and prizes for excellence were given to the following students. (This event marks the end of the current student exhibition at the centre):

1st prize — Su'ad Shalhoub (Sculpture)
Runner-up 1st prize — Abeer Najjar (Drawing 2)
2nd prize — Hanza Dababeh (Drawing 1)
Runner-up 2nd prize — Khalidoun Jreissat (Sculpture).



THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

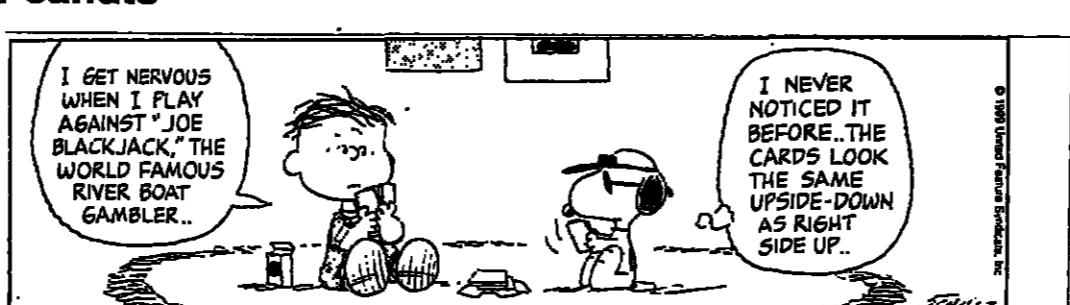


By Edgar Fontaine
Dighton, MA

ACROSS
1 Fettuccine or linguine
6 Once more
10 Once more
14 P-Day beach
15 Congressional aisle
16 Aromatic annual plant
17 "Lowercase" poet?
19 Hgt.
20 "Miniver"
21 Inner Hebrides island
22 New Orleans university
24 Structure: abbr.
25 Plant new seeds
26 Indian and Arctic
29 Combustible structure
32 Pond scum
33 Shopping complexes
34 Vanity
35 Scottish caps
36 Hoosagow
37 Pecky insect
38 Epoch
39 Weekend cowboys
40 Not spoken
41 Gave an account
43 Quaking trees
44 Medicinal fluid
45 Mineral veins
46 Lug laboriously
48 Caspian leather
49 Adams Family cousin
52 Jai —
53 "The Catcher in the Rye" author
56 Strong wind
57 Expel
58 Malina town
59 Pointed tools
60 Make a hole
61 Behind time

DOWN
1 Verse form
2 Part of USA
3 Pouchlike structures
4 Watch abbr.
5 Pooh's creator
6 Copying
7 "Peter Pan" dog
8 Easter item
9 Rhode Island town
10 Spotted wildcat
11 Author of "Lady Chatterley's Lover"
12 Bien Phu, Vietnam
13 Rescue
18 Carnaby Street shoppes, once
23 Manipulates
24 Sheep bleats
25 Stirs to anger
26 Like Cheers
27 Santa CA
28 Star of "The Defenders"
29 Falsified
30 Once more
31 Actress Annie
33 Computer communicator
36 False charge
37 Mountain passes
39 Be bold
40 "The Waste Land" poet
42 Trusts
43 Asian lake
45 Pontificate
46 Heroic tale
47 Talon
48 "Back in the
Land" poet
49 Borodin opera,
"Prince
50 Look after
51 Home of Paris
54 Couple
55 Gun grp.

Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n Jeff



THE BETTER HALF.

By Glasbergen



"I've decided to intensify my exercise program. I bought a heavier TV remote."

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

FLONE

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CREDY

BORREK

ROSIAL

Answer: IN THE

Yesterday's Jumbles: TRUTH SCARF ZEALOT PREACH RAZOR SHARP (Answers tomorrow)

Answer:

Business & Finance

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Export and Finance Bank boosts net pretax profit by 60 per cent in 1998

** NET PRETAX profit generated by the Export and Finance Bank last year reached JD2.3 million, a 60 per cent increase over the JD1.43 million recorded in 1997. Audited financial statements, which were approved by the Central Bank, showed the total balance sheet at the end of 1998 exceeding the JD86 million mark.

According to the financial statements, the shareholders' equity rose to over JD17.7 million and the portfolio of credit facilities shot up to JD42.3 million. Customers' deposits increased by JD11.6 million to JD37 million and cash deposits (margins) soared by 155 per cent to more than JD13 million.

The profit and loss statement revealed a total of about JD3.8 million in net earnings from interest and commission and an increase in general reserves and retained earnings to the JD746,500 level.

Meanwhile, the Export and Finance Bank will launch three-month certificates of deposit (CDs) worth JD3.0 million (\$4.22 million) on March 9, 1999, maturing on June 9, 1999, with an annual interest rate of 9.6 per cent and six-month CDs worth JD2.0 million (\$2.82 million) on March 9, 1999, maturing on Sept. 9, 1999, with an annual interest rate of 9.9 per cent. The CDs are denominated in multiples of JD5,000 (\$7,000). Although the bank will not repurchase the issue, the CDs are negotiable, and may be transferred to another account holder upon demand.

The CDs, the only issue currently offered by a Jordanian bank, were marketed in order to attract longer term funding and direct the balance sheet structure. "Although the bank has a wide and diversified base of depositors, a more stable source of funding is needed to support the asset/liability management of the bank's portfolio and provide funding for longer term loans. The CDs give us the ability to select exact maturity dates to correspond with future cash requirements," Ali Al Husry, chairman and chief executive officer of the Export and Finance Bank said.

The bank has been building up its funding structure to accommodate its growing client base. "We are pursuing a plan aimed at attracting private and public sector deposits with competitive interest rates. In the coming year, we intend to introduce various other instruments to attract a wider and more diversified base of depositors as a more stable source of funding," Al Husry said.

The Export and Finance Bank's commercial activities are focused on the conventional role as providers of working capital and trade finance, whereas investment banking services are being introduced to help facilitate access to longer term financing. With the introduction of various savings and investment instruments, the Export and Finance Bank will be able to further mobilise savings in favour of productive activities, and encourage private capital inflows.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) There's lots of scuttlebutt floating around today, but don't take it seriously. Everybody's got an opinion. How can you tell which one is the truth? Well, right now it's going to be difficult, because all the facts are not in. So instead of making a decision now, just continue to gather as much information as you can.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You like to know where every penny goes, and today that'll be a real challenge. There's money coming in from unexpected sources and money going out for unanticipated costs. You'll need imagination, but maybe not control. Did you ever consider that you should be steering, not trying to control everything that's going on?

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) The moon in your sign makes you very powerful, but the sun in Pisces could draw you up short. This is a non-verbal sign. Pisceans communicate without speaking; and you, of course, are the sign of verbal communication. Today, if you want to be really wise, do less talking and more listening. That's what the smart money will be doing.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) You may feel like somebody's leaning over your shoulder, watching your every move and taking notes. Well, you're looking great, but you may be a little self-conscious. If you can keep your mind on business, you'll do fine. But if you let your personal life encroach on company time, there could be a problem.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) You naturally rise to the position of the leader in almost any team you're on. That doesn't mean the others always mind you, however. Today, be careful to listen. Don't just tell others what to do. Ask them what they think should be done. Your chances of success will improve dramatically the more people you relate to in this manner.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Just when you think everything's figured out, somebody will want to change it all around again. You prefer a nice routine, so you know what's expected of you. Instead of arguing with how things are, use these conditions to your advantage. There are a few changes you've been thinking about suggesting, and now's the perfect time.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) If you're like most Libras, you weight things in the balance. You figure out all the reasons for and all those against, and eventually the answer becomes obvious. But this time, things could look tired. You could find yourself unable to decide which way to go. If so, this old adage will most likely work again. Follow the path with heart.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Be careful with your money today. A misunderstanding or accident could cost more than you expected. A misunderstanding over money with somebody you love is a distinct possibility, so take care. If money is involved, count to 10 before you express an opinion, and listen before you talk. And read the fine print.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Someone's yanking your string today, trying to make you think, or make you change. You don't know whether to get mad or excited. Actually, whatever changes occur now should be beneficial, but pay attention. You don't want to stub your toe while you're dancing in the rain and wind up not only in love but also in plaster cast.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 19) Things are not as they are supposed to be, as they used to be, or as you thought they were. So watch out. It looks like somebody's trying to pull a trick on you. If you're wheeling and dealing, take care. Make sure you read all the fine print on any contract you're thinking about signing, that's for sure.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 18) You might be feeling a little frisky and lucky, but don't get carried away or pretend to be grander than you are. It looks like you want to impress someone and take him or her out to a really great dinner that costs more than your rent. If that's an exaggeration, you can figure out what parts of it are useful, and discard the rest.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) You could have a really lucky break concerning money today, but something else is going to be a problem. Looks like someone who's near and dear to you will say something that hurts your feelings. If that happens, don't despair. He or she probably didn't mean it, and besides, you're the lucky winner, right?

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

Lebanon launches Middle East's first Eurobond

LONDON (R) — Lebanon became the first country in the Middle East to borrow in euros, reinforcing the new European unit's status as global currency and underlining its attraction for emerging market borrowers.

The deal, aimed at diversifying Lebanon's investor base, was seen as an important test of investor appetite — both European appetite for Lebanese debt and appetite among Lebanon's traditional Middle East investor base for euros.

Strong demand for the planned dual-currency deal, originally intended to comprise \$250 million in dollar bonds and 100 million in euros, meant the euro tranche was increased to 300 million euros and the dollar tranche downsized to \$200 million.

"The aim of this deal was to diversify Lebanon's traditional dollar-oriented investor base and to test demand in the new European currency," said Dan Vallimarescu, director of emerging market new issues at Merrill Lynch.

"The result has been highly successful and we have been able to launch the first euro deal from the Middle East not only in a bigger size than originally anticipated but also at an extremely tight

spread."

Lebanon, which is rated BAA by Moody's Investors Service and BB-minus by Standard & Poor's Corp., priced the euro tranche at a spread of 393 basis points over OATS, only slightly wider than its dollar tranche, which was priced at a spread of 355 basis points over U.S. treasury bonds.

Lebanon launched the Middle East's first Eurobond in 1994 and now has around \$2.5 billion outstanding. All outstanding bonds are in dollars except a \$20 million market bond from 1997.

Lebanon's dollarised economy and the high number of dollar-rich Lebanese expatriates mean that its traditional investor base has generally preferred dollar paper. A strong bid for Lebanese paper from local investors means that it is able to raise funds more cheaply than its similarly rated peers.

"Some of Lebanon's funding advantage in dollars has clearly transferred into euros," said an emerging debt trader at a European bank. He added that the strong performance of Lebanon's bonds in the secondary market had encouraged some relative value European investors to buy the bond.

"Lebanese bonds tend to be bought by loyal Middle East investors who hold them to maturity. The promise of a strong and stable secondary market performance is likely to have attracted a number of European investors who would not normally buy a credit such as Lebanon at such a tight spread," he explained.

Merrill Lynch officials estimated that around 40 per cent of the euro-denominated bonds sold to European investors — mainly institutional investors in France, Germany and Switzerland, with the remainder to Middle East investors.

The dollar bonds were placed almost exclusively with Lebanon's traditional Middle East investor base.

Meanwhile, Bank of Lebanon Governor Riad Salameh said the government's 1999 budget should include a \$2 billion borrowing programme to counter a budget deficit expected to exceed 40 per cent of spending.

Lebanon's parliament last year approved a \$2 billion foreign credit scheme which was exhausted by a dollar and euro-denominated sovereign bond issue worth \$550 million.

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Pacers keep Nets reeling

INDIANAPOLIS (R) — Mark Jackson's nine-foot leaner in the lane with six-tenths of a second remaining — his only basket of the game — lifted the Indiana Pacers to a wild 80-79 victory over the reeling New Jersey Nets on Sunday.

Indiana staggered to the finish, missing 14 straight shots in a 7-57 drought before Reggie Miller and Chris Mullin hit consecutive 3-pointers.

For a 78-75 lead with 46 seconds left, Mullin finished with 21 points and Miller added 18.

The Nets have dropped six of their last seven games.

In Minneapolis, Joe Smith had a season-high 30 points and 13 rebounds and Kevin Garnett added 22 points, 19 boards and seven assists as the Minnesota Timberwolves cooled off the Sacramento Kings, 102-90.

Stephon Marbury contributed 23 points and 15 assists and only one turnover for Minnesota, which has won seven of its first nine games.

Chris Webber scored 20 points and Tariq Abdul-Wahad added 14 for Sacramento.

In New York, the Knicks beat the Chicago Bulls 79-63 in a boring game notable for the Bulls franchise record fewest points.

Allan Houston scored 25 points on 10-of-15 shooting from the field and Kurt Thomas added 17 points for the Knicks, who targeted the Bulls during the Michael Jordan era but consistently came up short.

"It was not Knicks-Bulls of old without Scottie (Pippen). Michael and

Dennis (Rodman), but we still have a job to do," said New York's Patrick Ewing, who hit just 4-of-15 shots from the field and finished with 10 points and seven blocked shots.

Brent Barry led the bulls with 19 points but his teammates combined to hit just 17-of-56 shots from the field. Toni Kukoc had 16 points, hitting just 6-of-19 shots.

The Bulls' previous scoring low point was in 1994 when they scored just 63

points when Jordan was in his first retirement.

In San Antonio, Tim Duncan and Mario Elie picked up the slack for foul-plagued David Robinson as the San Antonio Spurs rolled to an 85-64 victory over the Detroit Pistons, who were held to the lowest total in franchise history.

Duncan recorded his fourth straight double-double with 17 points and 14 rebounds while Elie added 16 points in his first start of the season, helping San

Antonio (5-5) snap a two-game losing streak and climb back to the .500 mark.

"They get tired of me talking," Elie added. "We have talent but we have to believe. It takes more than talent alone. It takes heart to win." Robinson scored just 10 points, playing only 15 minutes after picking up his fourth foul in the first minute of the third quarter.

In Washington, Mitch Richmond scored 25 points and Rod Strickland just missed a triple-double as the Wizards won their third straight game with an 86-75 victory over the Celtics, who benched three starters. Guard Kenny Anderson, forward Ron Mercer and centre Tony Battie all began the game on the bench and entered midway through the first quarter. Starting in their place were Dana Barros, Bruce Bowen and Andrew Delecerq, who did very little to slow down the Wizards.

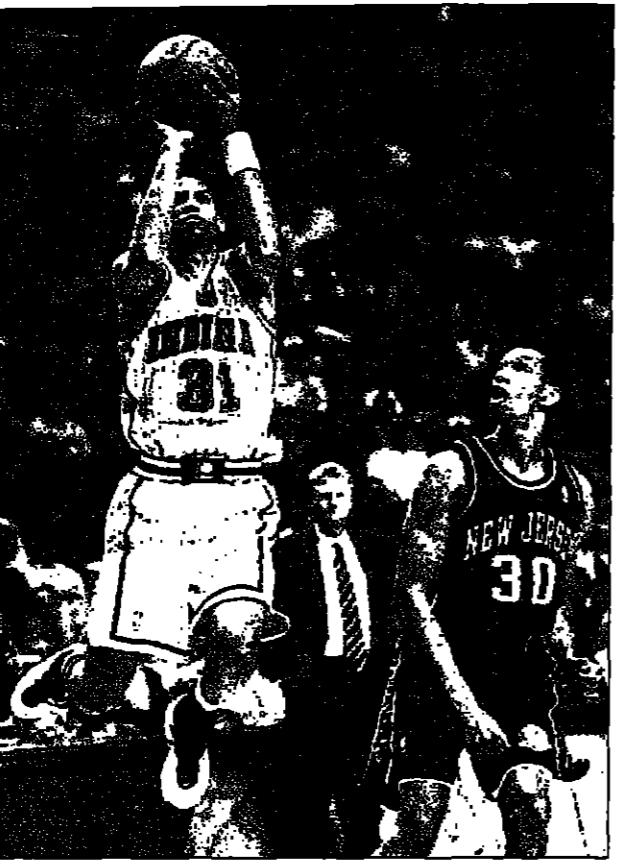
"It was just something I tried because of (Washington's) quickness," said Celtics coach Rick Pitino.

Barros shot 2-of-12 and had just two assists. Bowen scored just three points and Delecerq contributed five. Anderson managed six points, while Mercer scored 17 points and Battie pulled down 11 rebounds.

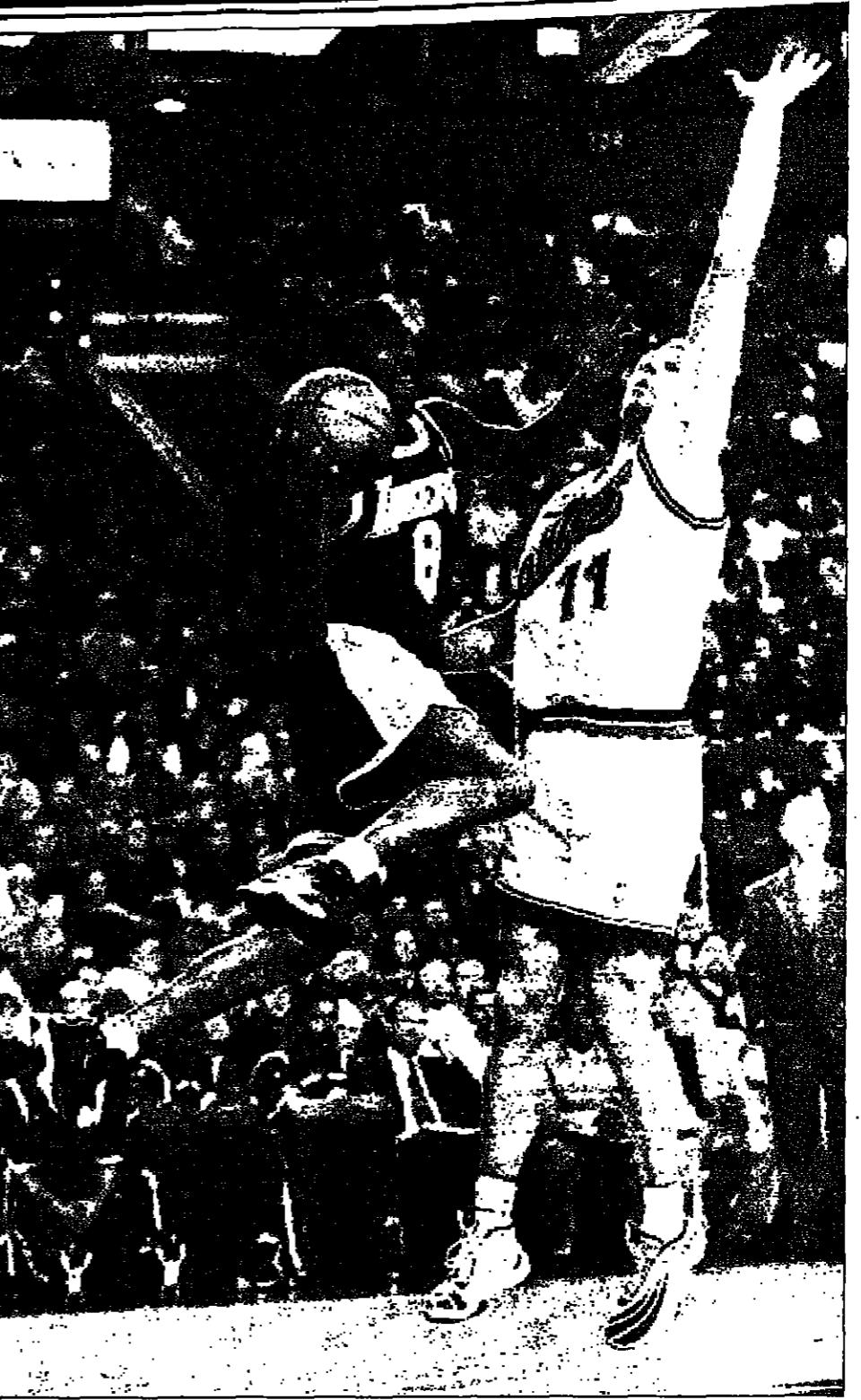
In Toronto, the Raptors' rookie Vince Carter scored a season-high 27 points in a 102-87 victory over the Vancouver Grizzlies before a sellout crowd of 19,800.

With the game tied 72-72, Carter dunked to ignite a 10-2 run with 9:14 remaining. He capped the spurt with a 3-pointer that gave

O'Neal finished with 27 points on 11-of-24 shooting.



Indiana Pacers forward Reggie Miller (L) shoots before New Jersey Nets guard Kerry Kittles (R) during first quarter play at Market Square Arena February 21 in Indianapolis, In. (AFP photo)



Los Angeles Laker Eddie Jones (L) looks to dish off a pass against Seattle Supersonic Detlef Schrempf (R) during first half of play February 21 in Seattle (AFP photo)

Roma fans mourn scoreless draw at Fiorentina

FLORENCE, Italy (R) — AS Roma supporters, whose bared for Lazio generates the fiercest derby in Serie A, have never forgotten how a late goal against Ascoli 24 years ago saved their arch-rivals from relegation.

On Monday the Roma faithful were in mourning again after their side's scoreless draw at second-placed Fiorentina put the old enemy two points clear in Serie A for the first time since 27 October 1974.

After 22 matches, Lazio are top on 45 points, with Fiorentina dropping to second, level with AC Milan, for the first time since last November. Roma are a distant eighth, 13 points behind Lazio.

In the streets of the Italian capital on Sunday night Lazio fans were singing the popular hit of the 1980s, written to celebrate Roma's 1983 league championship: "Grazie, Roma," the Roman axis dolls," proclaimed Gazzetta dello Sport in a front-page editorial. "(Coach Zdenek) Zeman fields the perfect team to block Fiorentina and Lazio

do the rest, defeating Inter (1-0)." Corriere Dello Sport added further salt to Roma's wounds: "Lazio have found a precious ally in Roma. A bizarre twist of destiny means that Lazio are top for the first time in 25 years thanks to their cousins."

To make matters worse, Roma enjoyed the better of the match at the Artemio Franchi stadium and would have claimed their first away win since April 1998 but for the goal-keeping of Francesco Toldo and the woodwork.

Brazilian striker Paolo Sergio hit the post in the first half while Toldo, playing his 300th match in Serie A, saved bravely at the feet of Sergio's compatriot Fabio Junior and Damiano Tommasi after the break.

Without their inspirational Argentine captain, who had scored 18 goals in 20 matches before twisting knee ligaments two weeks ago against Milan, Fiorentina have failed to find the net in 277 minutes of Serie A action.

Batistuta's replacement Carmine Esposito failed to make an impression against Roma, although Andrea Tarozzi did hit the post in the 82nd minute and Robbiati dribbled through the visitors' defence in the dying seconds before putting a shot just wide.

Not even Edmundo could make up for the absence of Batistuta.

manager Giovanni Trapattoni, whose side's championship campaign is losing momentum after two goalless home draws, to Milan and Roma, and last week's 1-0 defeat at in-form Udinese.

"We did the most we possibly could," a resigned Trapattoni said of a side missing suspended defenders Moreno Torricelli and Giovanni Falcone, midfielder Sandro Cois and the irreplacable Batistuta.

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No doubt Roma fans would prefer the former, hoping to see Fiorentina back at the top in place of hated Lazio.

The Brazilian, whose refusal to postpone a trip to the Rio Carnival after Batistuta's injury earned the wrath of players and fans, had the chance to redeem himself in the first half.

But, with the goal at his mercy six metres out, Edmundo's shot looked as though it had come straight out of last Sunday's photos of him playing soccer volleyball on the Copacabana beach — sailing high over the net.

"He tried hard but the popular court of the people has suspended its verdict on Edmundo," one commentator said.

In the absence of Batistuta, apparently making a quicker than expected recovery, Serie A is doing much the same with Fiorentina's championship chances.

"Is it 'arrivederci' or 'addio' to the top of the table?" asked Gazzetta dello Sport.

No doubt Roma fans would prefer the former, hoping to see Fiorentina back at the top in place of hated Lazio.

Source says Tyson outburst came after being taken off antidepressants

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Mike Tyson had been taken off an antidepressant drug at the direction of a jail physician two days before he became enraged and threw a television set against some bars in a Maryland jail, a source close to the fighter told the Associated Press.

The incident prompted jail officials to lock Tyson in an isolation cell at the Montgomery County Detention Center, and could lead to anything from a reprimand to further jail time for the former heavyweight champion.

A source close to Tyson said jail officials had stopped giving him the antidepressant Zoloft two days before the Friday afternoon incident. The medication was stopped after Tyson refused to let a prison psychologist examine him.

Tyson refused on the grounds he had already undergone extensive psychological examinations by doctors at Massachusetts General Hospital in October and was under the contin-

uing care of Dr. Richard Goldberg, who heads the psychiatric programme at Georgetown University, the source said.

Tyson had been taking Zoloft on a daily basis for the past four months, except for the week prior to his Jan. 16 fight with Francois Botha. Tyson was weaned gradually from the drug during that week, and began taking it again the day after the fight, the source, who asked not to be identified, told the AP.

Neither jail officials nor Goldberg could be reached for comment. A call to the home of Tyson's Washington, D.C., attorney, Paul Kemp, was not returned.

Tyson was in a common area with other prisoners on Friday and was talking on the phone when a guard came in and hung the phone up, the source said.

The action enraged Tyson, who picked up the television set and threw it against some bars, Tyson, the source said, immediately apologized

and offered to pay for the TV.

Doctors at Massachusetts General testified at Tyson's licensing hearing before the Nevada Athletic Commission in October that the former heavyweight champion was often depressed but that his mood swings could be controlled if he took the proper medication.

On the medication, Tyson was cheerful and cooperative in interviews with reporters when training for the Botha fight in Phoenix in December. The week of the fight, though, he was combative at times and engaged in a profanity-laced tirade against a New York television reporter four days before the fight.

Tyson was being held in an 8-by-5-foot isolation cell pending a hearing either Monday or Tuesday on a citation for destruction of county property in the jail in the Washington suburb. Tyson refused on the grounds he had already undergone extensive psychological examinations by doctors at Massachusetts General Hospital in October and was under the contin-

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Tyson, the source said, immediately apologized

United States 2, Chile 1

FORT LAUDERDALE, Florida (AP) — The U.S. national team said goodbye to captain Thomas Dooley and welcomed an encouraging glimpse into the future.

Ben Olsen and Eddie Lewis, two members of a massive youth movement under new coach Bruce Arena, scored their first international goals as the United States beat Chile 2-1 Sunday.

The result kept the Americans unbeaten in four games since Arena took over the national programme, including a stunning 3-0 win over Germany two weeks ago in Jacksonville.

"I will miss being around the young players on the national team," said Dooley, a veteran of two World Cups who is ending his international career after 81 appearances.

"Otherwise I feel good about leaving space for younger players. I won't be around (for the 2002 World Cup), so it makes sense to step out at a high level." The U.S. youngsters showed a superior level of play against Chile, taking another step in helping rid memories of the team's disastrous World Cup performance last year.

"It's a great feeling to get my first goal and help the team get another win," Olsen said. "We're on a roll and we want to keep it going." Sunday's lineup included just four players from the squad that faced Germany. Still, it was good enough for the U.S.

Germany game was no fluke." Chile coach Nelson Acosta fielded a team featuring six players getting their first international starts. The best of the group was 20-year-old midfielder David Pizarro, who nearly caught U.S. goalkeeper Zach Thornton napping in the second minute with a 40-yard blast that forced a diving save.

Acosta said he was pleased despite the loss, "because Chile was playing just its second game since last summer's World Cup."

"This is a young team and we only had two days training together, so overall I'm happy," Acosta said.

The first half was remarkable only for the five yellow cards handed out by Mexican referee Pascal Rebolledo. By game's end, the teams had combined for 60 fouls and six cautions.



Manuel Neira of Chile (R) grabs the shirt of Richie Williams of the U.S. as they go for the ball during first half action of their friendly match February 21 in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. The U.S. won 2-1 (AFF photo)

CINEMA TEL:463-4144 PHILADELPHIA '1'	CINEMA TEL:463-4144 PHILADELPHIA '2'	CINEMA TEL:597-9238 PLAZA	CINEMA TEL:567-7420 CONCORDE	CINEMA TEL:593-4793 GALLERIA 1	CINEMA TEL:593-4793 GALLERIA 2	Risham Yanes Theatre TEL:462-5155
Bruce Willis .. in MERCURY RISING Shows: 10:30, 8:30, 6:15, 3:30, 12:30	Adel Imam, Wafa'Amer & Kamal Shinawi .. in ALWAD MAHROUS TBA' AL WAZIR Shows: 10:30, 8:30, 6:15, 3:30, 12:30	Comedian A'del Emmam .. in AL ZA'EM	Adel Imam, Wafa'Amer & Kamal Shinawi .. in ALWAD MAHROUS TBA' AL WAZIR Shows: 12:30, 2:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	EDDIE MURPHY DR. DOLITTLE Shows: 3:30, 5:30 only	SINGLES Shows: 3:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	CLOSED FOR DECORATION

• Haas appreciates compliments, but would rather play than talk

MEMPHIS, Tennessee (AP) — Tommy Haas is heading in the right direction — up. "There's only three tournaments that I've played this year."

"There's still a lot more tournaments to go, and I'll talk more about how this year went for me when it's the end," said Haas.

So far, he's reached the final in Auckland, New Zealand, the semifinals of the Australian Open, and capped his run at the Kroger St. Jude indoor tournament Sunday with a 6-4, 6-1 victory over an ailing Jim Courier for his first ATP tour title.

Even Courier's sprained left foot couldn't diminish Haas' happiness with the victory.

"I'm glad it came against a former No. 1. ... It really makes it special," the 20-year-old German said.

Haas is 14-2 in match play after taking time out to rest at the end of last year. He also switched from a Head racket to a Dunlop, which has given him extra power on his serve and groundstrokes.

The victory moved his ranking from No. 22 to a career-high No. 16.

To reach the final, Haas upset top-seeded Todd Martin.

Courier, who held the No. 1 ranking for 58 weeks in 1992 and 1993, didn't feel that he gave Haas a strong test Sunday because his foot kept him from moving. He tried to overpower Haas with his serve and won his first service game with four aces. But Haas eventually took advantage of Courier's lack of mobility.

• Kafelnikov aims at No. 1

LONDON (AP) — Yevgeny Kafelnikov could displace Pete Sampras as the World's No. 1 player at this week's Guardian Direct Open in London.

Kafelnikov has 3,637 ranking points and trails Sampras by 58.

Sampras is not playing this week.

The Russian won the Australian Open three weeks ago — his second Grand Slam title — and picked up his second season victory Sunday, beating Tim Henman in the final of an ATP indoor event in Rotterdam.

"I want to be No. 1 and I'm going to be trying my best in

London to get there," Kafelnikov said after beating Henman.

Kafelnikov, who has never held the No. 1 spot, opens play Tuesday in London in a first-round match against Magnus Gustafsson.

If Kafelnikov reaches the semifinals — and beats Thomas Johansson in the quarters — he will take over the No. 1 spot.

Kafelnikov is also guaranteed the No. 1 spot by reaching the finals — no matter whom he beats en route, ATP spokesman David Law said.

Sampras has spent a total of

260 weeks atop the ATP rankings.

Ivan Lendl holds the record for most weeks at No. 1 (270) followed by Jimmy Connors.

Sampras was dislodged twice last season as No. 1 by Chilean Marcelo Rios, who held the top spot for a total of six weeks.

Sampras regained the No. 1 spot on Aug. 24.

The American, who has won 11 Grand Slam titles — one short of Roy Emerson's record 12 — last season became the first player in ATP history to finish No. 1 for six consecutive seasons.

Sampras is not playing this week.

The Russian won the Australian Open three weeks ago — his second Grand Slam title — and picked up his second season victory Sunday, beating Tim Henman in the final of an ATP indoor event in Rotterdam.

"I want to be No. 1 and I'm going to be trying my best in

Martinsen of Norway wins women's 5-km classical

RAMSAU, Austria (AP) — Bente Martinsen of Norway, the Olympic bronze medalist, clinched the gold medal in the women's 5-kilometre classical style cross-country race at the Nordic Ski World Championship Monday.

Martinsen, 26, leads the overall World Cup this season and has had three victories on the circuit. She is a specialist in classical style and won comfortably ahead of Olga Danilova of Russia, the bronze medalist at the 1997 worlds in Trondheim, Norway.

"You can't say I want to be No. 1. It's something that happens eventually." In Rotterdam, Netherlands, Australian Open winner Yevgeny Kafelnikov beat Tim Henman 6-2, 7-6 (7-3) to capture the Abn-Amro tournament. The victory put Kafelnikov in position to move ahead of Pete Sampras in the race for the World No. 1 ranking. He trails Sampras by 85 points.

In Hanover, Germany, Jana Novotna finally won the Faber Grand Prix in her fourth consecutive trip to the final of the WTA Tour event. Novotna beat Venus Williams 6-4, 6-4, finally converting her third match point to win her 26th career title.

In Bogota, Colombia, Fabiola Zuluaga won her first WTA Tour title in her hometown, downing Christina Papadaki of Greece 6-1, 6-3.

said. Two Russians came in fourth and fifth, Svetlana Nagaykina and Nina Gavriluk. Nagaykina was 25 seconds behind, Gavriluk 29.4.

They were followed by two Ukrainians, Valentina Shevchenko at 40.3 seconds behind and Irina Taranenko-Terelia, at 40.7.

Stefania Belmondo of Italy, who won the 15-km freestyle in the opening women's event, came in eighth, trailing 43.7 seconds.

She remains well on target for another gold medal.

Kristina Smigun of Estonia, silver medalist in the 15-km, was just behind at 43.9.

The powerful Russian team dropped Olympic champion Larissa Lazutina from the starting foursome.

"There is strong competition within the Russian squad for places in the starting team," Danilova said.

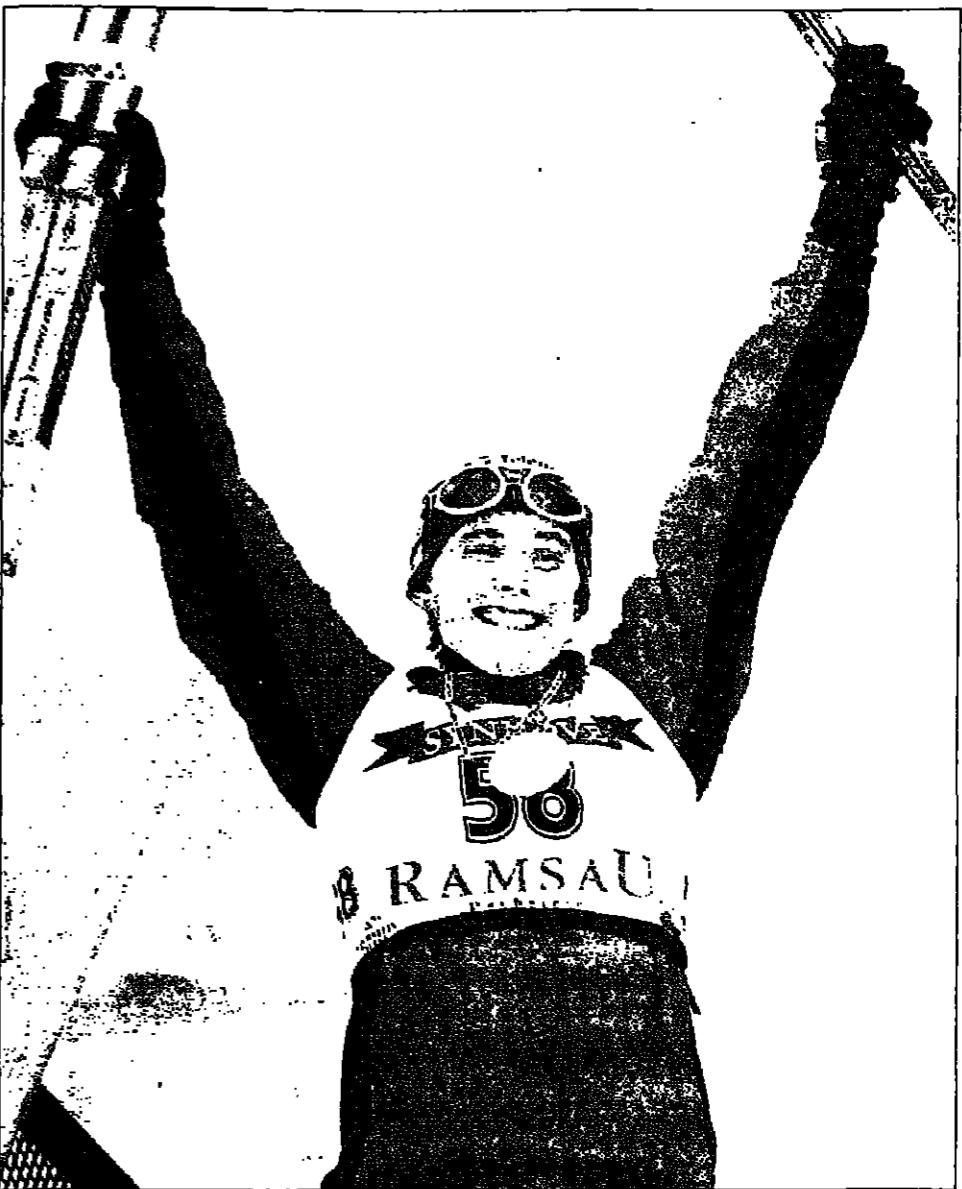
A decade after Jens Weissflog's triumph in Lahti, the Germans have a world champion in ski jumping once again.

Martin Schmitt won the gold on the 120-km hill Sunday, crowning the season in which he has already clinched seven World Cup victories and leading a 1-2 German finish.

Sven Hannawald, in the lead after the first round, took the silver medal on the hill in nearby Bischofshofen.

Mastering foggy conditions, Schmitt collected a total of 263.4 points for his two efforts of 126 and 129.5 metres, beating his good friend Hannawald by a mere 1.7 points.

"My first jump wasn't 100 per cent but the other one was superb," said Schmitt, who had a disappointing 14th place on the same hill last month, wasting



Bente Martinsen of Norway celebrates her victory in the women's 5-km cross-country race in classical technique at the World Nordic Skiing Championships on Monday, February 23, 1999. Martinsen won the race in a time of 12:49.8 ahead of Olga Danilova of Russia and Katerina Neumannova of the Czech Republic (Reuters photo)

while all four of his teammates finished in the top 10 — an achievement that makes Japan the top favourite for the team competition.

"I finished third in Bischofshofen during the four hill tour. I really like this hill," said the 25-year-old newcomer on the star-studded Japanese team.

Australia's Freeman back on track

SYDNEY (R) — A visit to Sydney's Olympic Stadium and a power-house return to competition have left Australia's world 400 metres champion Cathy Freeman hungry to get back into the athletics fast lane.

Freeman, who missed last September's Commonwealth Games with a foot injury, completed her first 400 metres race in seven months in dash-ing style on Saturday.

The 26-year-old Australian raced away to win in 50.76 seconds, beating Britain's com-monwealth games silver medalist Alison Curbishley (51.55).

Although well outside her best, it was enough to have Freeman smiling broadly after the foot problems that sidelined her in the second half of last year and a muscle strain that forced her to miss recent domestic competitions.

"I was really determined and passionate about getting a good, solid run," Freeman said after the win at an international meeting staged on the warm-up track for the 2000 Olympics.

She said the hunger to compete still burned brightly.

"I am about trying to win every time I go out there, I am not about titles and medals," Freeman told reporters.

"Even with an egg and spoon in my mouth I am competitive," on Friday Freeman, also the silver medallist behind France's Marie-José Perec at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, made a trip to the cavernous main stadium for next year's Olympics.

She said later it had helped fire her up for Saturday's race.

"I was doing some stories for a television programme and... they had my Atlanta (Olympics) final run on (the video screen)," said Freeman.

"all the competitor's juices started flowing again." Freeman is scheduled to compete in a relay event at the world indoor championships in Japan next month. Her manager, Nick Bideau, said she might also contest the 400 individual event but would delay a decision until she arrived there.

"She doesn't really like running indoors and she's got to feel comfortable about the track and conditions before she runs in the individual race," Bideau said on Monday.

For now Freeman, who will attempt to defend her world title in Spain later this year, is simply happy to be back on the track.

"I was not supremely confident because I'd had an upset stomach," Freeman said of Saturday's race. "but once I came out to the track everything took care of itself."

"I just surprised myself. I am just happy to be running again and know where I am in terms of fitness." Saturday's meeting was staged in the shadows of the 110,000-seat main stadium for the Sydney Games.

The stadium is the biggest in modern Olympic history, and can accommodate four jumbo jets side by side under the span of the main arch. It is almost 14 storeys tall at its highest point.

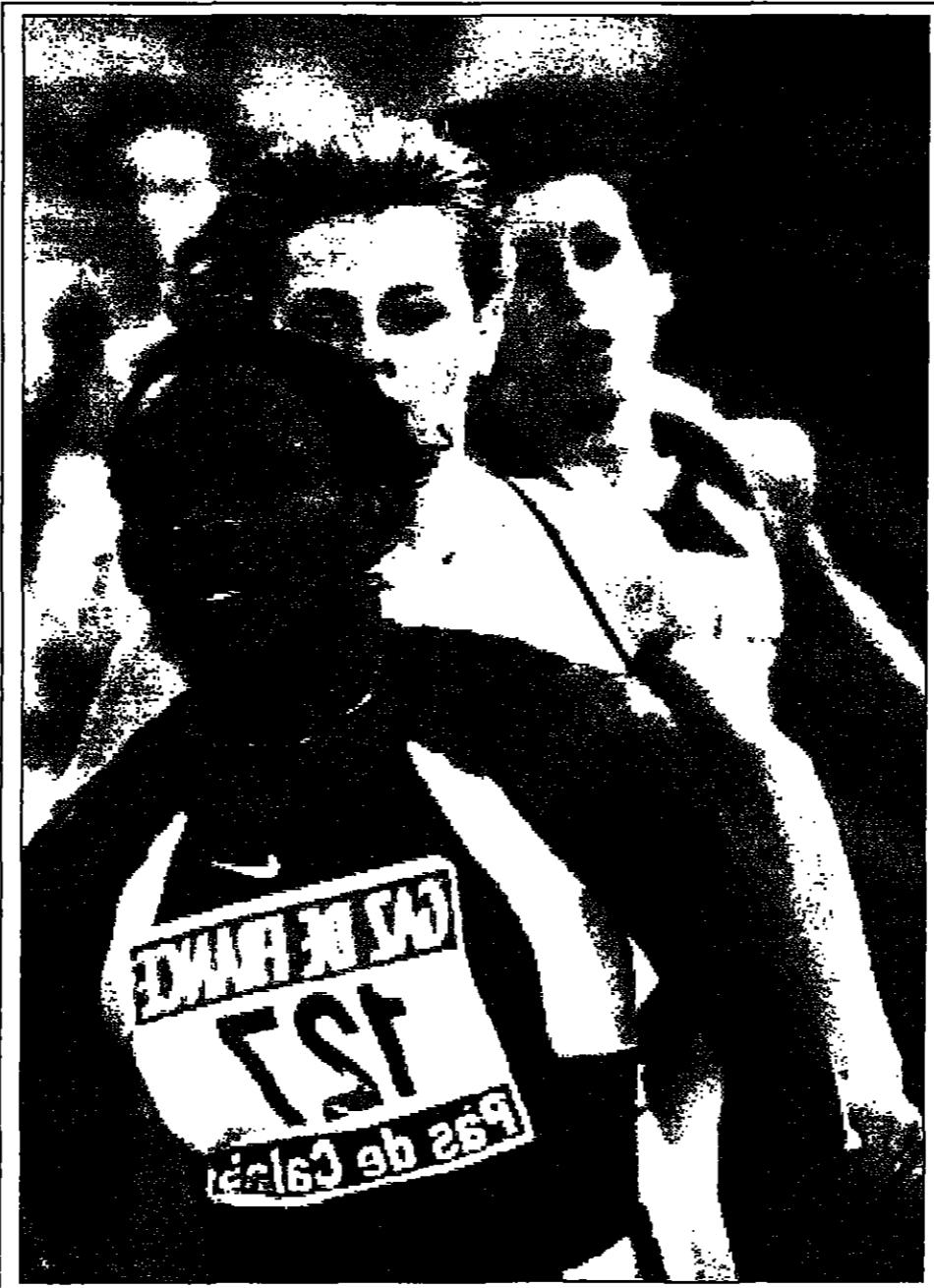
Freeman, however, is happy not to compete there before next year's games.

"I don't want to be in there again, I've seen it, I know what to expect," Freeman told reporters.

Asked if she'd like to see athletics events staged there before the games, she said: "I'd definitely like to see it held exclusively for the Olympics."

She said later it had helped fire her up for Saturday's race.

"I was doing some stories for a television programme and... they had my Atlanta (Olympics) final run on (the video screen)," said Freeman.



Mozambican runner Maria Mutola leads the pack to win the 800-mtr in 1 minute 57.06 seconds, on Sunday at the international indoor meet in Lievin (AFP photo)

Gebreselassie fails in 3,000m world indoor record attempt

LIEVIN, France (AP) — Ethiopia's Haile Gebreselassie failed in his attempt to break the indoor 3,000m world record here on Sunday in just his fourth race of the year.

The Olympic 10,000m

champion clocked 7:31.25sec, well outside the world record of 7:24.90. It would have been his seventh indoor world record adding to his nine outdoors.

Other world record attempts which went by

the wayside included Gabriella Szabo, who clocked 8min 34.09sec over 3,000m and Mozambique's Maria Mutola, who ran 1:57.06 over 800m.

for the 10-kilometre event, a distance on which he has never before won.

"I couldn't sleep for two nights," said Myllyla. "I felt weak yesterday, but this morning everything was fine. I thought I would have the energy to compete but didn't think of winning gold."

Norway's Bjorn Daeblie led for the first 1.5-km of the race, with Myllyla in fourth position. Myllyla gained speed towards the finish and clocked a time of 24 minutes 19 seconds.

"The start wasn't easy. I had difficulty gaining speed," he said. "I thought that it wouldn't be my day. It was only after the 8-kilometre mark that I thought I had a chance of winning gold and I went for it."

This is the latest win for Myllyla, who took bronze at the winter Olympics in Nagano. He won the 50-km classic at Trondheim, Norway in 1997, where he also took silver in the 15-km freestyle and bronze in the 10-km classic.

"With the gold medal I've become Finland's most successful cross-country skier of all time," he added.



Mika Myllyla of Finland bites in his two gold medals after the men's 10-km cross-country race in classical technique at the World Nordic Skiing Championships on Monday, February 23, 1999. Myllyla won the race ahead of Alois Stadlober of Austria and Oddbjorn Hjelmeset of Norway and his second gold so far (Reuters photo)

RAMSAU, Austria (AP) — Finland's Olympic Champion Mika Myllyla won his second gold title at the Nordic Skiing World Championships here Monday when he took the 10 kilometres cross-country skiing event.

Austria's Alois Stadlober was second, with Odd-Bjorn Hjelmeset of Norway in third.

The 29-year-old also took the 30 kilometres cross-country skiing title on the opening day of the championships on Friday.

After his Friday win Myllyla admitted that he had difficulty concentrating

Blair government under fire from press over report on police racism

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Tony Blair's government was licking its wounds Monday after the country's powerful press forced it to abandon an attempt to keep the lid of secrecy on a controversial report.

Less than a month after Labour launched a new strategy aimed at bypassing the London papers in favour of less "aggressive" ethnic, regional and international media, it stood accused of trying to muzzle the press.

National newspapers on Monday were triumphant after Home Secretary Jack Straw backed down over a court injunction banning the Sunday Telegraph conservative broadsheet from printing sections of the report.

Due to be published on Wednesday, the independent inquiry's findings accuses the London metropolitan police of "institutionalised racism" in its investigation into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993.

In a weekend of high drama, Straw late Saturday obtained a court injunction against the Sunday Telegraph. But the story had already been carried in first editions of the newspaper, and less than 24 hours later the Telegraph and other papers succeeded in a partial lifting of the ban.

Straw defended his actions, insisting that the leaking of the report was "profoundly unfair" to the family of the

murdered black teenager, the police officers involved and to parliament as well.

But this argument was roundly rejected by national newspaper editors.

The Sun, the four-million-selling tabloid which dramatically switched support to Labour from the Conservatives before the May 1997 election, on Monday launched a front-page broadside against the Blair administration.

"Is this the most arrogant cabinet in history?" it asked above a front page photo of Blair and his cabinet.

In an uncharacteristically long two-page editorial, Britain's biggest newspaper lashed at Labour's "control-freak" tendencies.

"What got up the government's nose was that the press was controlling the agenda. And the press — at least, the national papers — have been declared the enemy because most of us refuse to toe the line and be Labour lapdogs."

The liberal Guardian broadsheet argued that the affair had "exposed the frailty of what should be one of our most basic human liberties and supplied a glimpse of what seems an alarmingly authoritarian streak at the highest levels of government."

No state secret had been revealed and national security was not at risk, making a court injunction indefensible, underlined the centre-right Times broadsheet.

"When a government bans the media from reporting a story it must have a good reason to do so."

"Instead this was a fit of pique that the carefully planned 'spin' for the launch of the report on Wednesday has been upset," the newspaper alleged.

Last year, the government blocked the British media from reprinting MI5 agent David Shayler's allegations about the involvement of British security services in an attempted assassination of Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi.

And in an earlier episode, Straw prevented the identity of his son — arrested for selling drugs to an undercover journalist — from being made public under the justification that a minor's privacy had to be protected.

Neither measures were popular, but were respected until the information leaked out elsewhere first.

Labour, which before taking office in the landslide 1997 election, honed the skills of controlling press coverage through an army of "spin doctors," has long been accused of trying to keep the same tight leash in government.

It drew the ire of Fleet Street last month, when after a series of newspaper revelations about the high-spending habits of cabinet ministers, it tried to limit London newspapers' influence by turning to other media seen as more compliant.



MILK QUOTAS ANGER ITALIAN FARMERS: Italian dairy farmers wave flags and shout slogans Monday after passing under the Rialto Bridge in Venice's Grand Canal during a protest against Italian government and EU times for exceeding milk quotas (AP photo)

Norwegian PM presses Israel to carry out West Bank pullbacks

TEL AVIV (AP) — Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik called on Israel's right-wing government Monday to carry out promised West Bank withdrawals despite upcoming national elections.

Bondevik, who met in Gaza City Sunday with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Monday in Jerusalem with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said he had urged both men to honour the Wye River land-for-security deal signed last October.

"I have emphasised both to the Israeli prime minister and to Yasser Arafat the importance of implementing the Wye memorandum, and this includes also the [West Bank] withdrawals," Bondevik said during a joint press conference with Netanyahu.

"Although we understand that there are difficulties in the middle of an election campaign here to move ahead with speed, I have expressed the need to keep it on track."

Bondevik also said he

believed Arafat would ultimately back down on his declared intention to unilaterally declare an independent state on May 4, when interim peace accords with Israel expire.

Netanyahu reiterated warnings Monday that such a move would "collapse the peace process" and lead Israel to take unilateral steps of its own, meaning the annexation of occupied territory.

But Bondevik said that following his talks with the Palestinian leader "my impression is that Yasser Arafat is open-minded and flexible, in order to find a sensible solution in the interests of both parties and in the interest of the peace process."

"Like everybody, we realise that the parties need more time after the fourth of May and also after the elections in Israel to negotiate a permanent peace accord, he said.

Arafat said on Sunday that the Palestinians were consulting with "friends and

brothers" about the May 4 deadline and other Palestinian officials suggested a statehood declaration could be postponed until the end of the year.

Netanyahu reiterated warnings Monday that such a move would "collapse the peace process" and lead Israel to take unilateral steps of its own, meaning the annexation of occupied territory.

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Arafat said on Sunday that the Palestinians were consulting with "friends and

NEWS IN BRIEF

Kazakh woman mummies mum

ALMATY (R) — A woman in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan, saying she was unable to afford funeral costs, has been arrested after mummifying her dead mother and three other relatives, police said on Monday. A police officer doing a routine check of documents noticed an odd smell coming from the woman's apartment, senior police inspector Rafik Valiyev told Reuters. Taking a closer look, the officer found three corpses sitting against a wall and another in a cardboard box. The woman said they were relatives who had died from various illnesses. The police said the woman, a graduate from a medical institute, explained she had mummified the bodies because she did not have enough money to pay for a burial. Autopsies were being done and murder charges had been filed against her.

Lebanon court punishes pigeon woman

HALBA (AFP) — A court in northern Lebanon sentenced a woman to pay 20,000 Lebanese pounds (\$13) or spend four days in jail because her pigeons pecked municipal flowers, judicial sources said Monday. A municipal guard in Halba ticketed Wafaa Hammoud, 39, because her pigeons and chicken were eating flowers and seeds planted by the municipality, they said. Hammoud was accused of failing to keep caged her birds which were "destroying plants and flowers in the municipal garden," they added. The woman said she cannot afford to pay the fine and had been raising the creatures for a living.

Iraq to send delegation to Vatican

BAGHDAD (AP) — President Saddam Hussein is to send an Islamic-Christian delegation to the Vatican to thank the Pope for his support of Iraq. Christian leader here said Monday. Chaldean Patriarch Raphael I Bidawid said the visit could take place in early March. He will lead the delegation which will also comprise two Muslim clerics and a foreign ministry official. "This visit reflects the appreciation of the Iraqi state for Pope John Paul II. His Holiness always calls for an end to injustice towards the people of the world, and especially the Iraqi people," he said.

Yemeni PM beats malaria

SANA (AFP) — Yemeni Prime Minister Abdul Karim Al Iryani has returned from Germany where he was being treated for malaria, the official SABA news agency reported Monday. Iryani left Sanaa on Feb. 12 for a hospital in Germany for tests and treatment.

Palestinians rally in support of Kurds

NABLUS (AFP) — Masked Palestinians brandishing mock weapons burned U.S. and Israeli flags and ripped up makeshift Turkish banners in a demonstration of support Monday for captured Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan. About 300 Palestinian youths gathered at Al Najah University for a rally announced as an anniversary celebration of the creation 31 years ago of the leftist PLO faction, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). Masked protesters carried portraits of Ocalan alongside pictures of DFLP leader Nayef Hawatmeh.

PNA to block attacks — Mordechai

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (R) — Former Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said on Monday the Palestinian National Authority had decided to prevent guerrilla attacks against Israel in the run-up to the May general election. Mordechai said Palestinian leaders made the position clear in contacts with him after the Wye River land-for-security deal broke down in December. "It will be very difficult in the future to put the peace process back on track if an attack is perpetrated now," Mordechai, a centrist candidate for prime minister, told visiting leaders of U.S. Jewish groups. "They are clever enough to understand that now, in the time of the election, if some of them make a mistake [and fail to prevent an attack] it will... damage the whole agreement. And they decided to wait a few months and to see what will happen."

'Iranian moderates barred from polls'

TEHRAN (R) — Iran's first nationwide local polls were thrown into confusion just four days before the vote, when a conservative supervision board barred candidates backing moderate President Mohammad Khatami from the race, pro-reform newspaper said on Monday.

The newspapers reported a last-minute bid by the panel, backed by hardliners in parliament, to block the leading figures of the pro-Khatami ticket from Friday's elections.

The board's order, which was immediately challenged by Khatami's interior ministry, came after several days of campaigning for races the president and his allies hope will ease the grip of the conservative clerical establishment.

"Despite the passage of three days of campaigning, the supervisory board rejected the main candidates of the [pro-Khatami] front," said the daily Salam.

The ban, if allowed to stand, was expected to dampen public enthusiasm for what has been billed by Khatami supporters and independent analysts alike as Iran's first real experience with grassroots democracy.

Salam said the order barring the candidates had been issued in a letter from the supervisory board to the interior minister, sent late on Sunday. Other pro-reform newspapers carried similar reports.

with Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik. This is very important for Israel and we believe it is very important for the EU," Netanyahu said during a joint press conference with Bondevik.

Bondevik went on to note that Israel was emerging as the principal competitor to California's Silicon Valley as a global centre of high-tech innovation.

Israel was the only non-European country to take part in the EU research and development programme during its first four-year session which ended last year.

The 1999-2002 phase of the programme will have a budget of 14.9 billion euros (\$17.6 billion).

Israel had angrily attacked

the EU over a preliminary decision in December not to renew its participation in the programme following Netanyahu's decision to suspend implementation of the Wye River peace accord with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu hails EU decision to allow Israel into project

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israel welcomed a decision Monday by the European Union (EU) to renew Israel's participation in a multi-billion dollar EU research and development programme despite European concern over the lack of progress in the Palestinian peace process.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had been informed of the decision by the EU Council of Ministers meeting in Luxembourg while holding talks here

EU officials denied any political motivation for the decision.

But the union's foreign ministers appeared to confirm Israeli suspicions when they issued a statement last month saying the union "deplored the continued suspension by the Israeli government of the implementation of the land-for-security memorandum."

It described Netanyahu's refusal to carry out further West Bank withdrawals required by the accord as a

Arafat seeks support from Germany

BONN (AP) — Yasser Arafat said Monday he was ready to discuss his plan to unilaterally declare a Palestinian state, the latest sign he may back off a May target date.

"We are very concerned to ensure that we talk with our friends about this question," the Palestinian leader said after meeting Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder in Bonn.

With Mideast peace-making stalled, Schroeder said the Palestinians have a right to their own state "in principle," but he called for renewed diplomacy for the moment.

"We both agree that it will be essential to bring about close consultation within Europe and between Europe and the United States on this point," Schroeder told reporters. "That will certainly happen in the weeks and months ahead."

Arafat has suggested he would declare statehood on May 4, the end of a five-year autonomy period spelled out in the Oslo peace accord with Israel.

But Western and Arab nations are pressuring Arafat to hold off because they worry it would worsen peace prospects with Israel, which holds elections on May 17.

Schroeder pledged that Germany would continue to make "a significant contribution" to aiding the Palestinians.

He also said he told Arafat that Germany "very strongly supports" activities of German firms active in the Palestinian areas.

Germany is the Palestinians' biggest European aid donor, and German industrial giant Siemens played a leading role in building a Palestinian airport in Gaza.

Arafat was quoted Sunday as saying he hopes "that there will be joint ventures between German, Palestinian and Israeli companies in the near future."

U.S. group reports sharp rise in Web hate sites

The KKK group, the neo-Nazi National Alliance and the Ku Klux Klan are among the most active hate sites on the Internet, says a report by the Anti-Defamation League.

Netanyahu has justified his freeze on the accord by citing alleged Palestinian violations of the agreement, which required Arafat to crack down on anti-Israel activities by Palestinians.

Pinochet's son seeks funds from Cuban exiles

MIAMI (AP) — A son of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet has come to the United States to lobby among Cuban exiles for his father's release.

Mark Pinochet, son of Gen. Pinochet, who was killed in 1998, has reportedly been invited to speak at the 10th anniversary of the coup.

Netanyahu has justified his freeze on the accord by citing alleged Palestinian violations of the agreement, which required Arafat to crack down on anti-Israel activities by Palestinians.

origin who lives in London. He is also accused of having links with the head of a group of Islamists who kidnapped a group of Western tourists in Yemen in December.

The abduction ended with four of the tourists killed when police intervened to rescue them.

Man immolates self after death of pigs

MINSK, Belarus — A man set himself alight after three pigs he had bought fell ill and died, Belarus' RIA news agency reported on Tuesday.

Man, from the western Siberian town of Altai, was so disturbed after the animals' death that he drank a large amount of spirit and set himself on fire.

British lawyer of suspects detained in Yemen

SANA (AP) — A British lawyer who went to Yemen to meet eight fellow countrymen on trial for terrorism is himself being held by the Yemeni authorities in the southern city of Aden. British Consul General David Pearce said Monday.

The lawyer, Rashad Yaacoub, "has been detained by the police since Monday afternoon," Pearce told AFP. "He is in the hospital. We visited him twice, and we will see him tonight. We have contacted the prosecutor, but no charge has been made yet," Pearce said.

He said Yaacoub had been taken to hospital after feeling ill.

Yaacoub met Yemeni attorney General Abdulla Al Utafi in Sanaa last week, claiming that the prosecution had violated the law during the trial of the eight Britons and two Algerians, according to Sheikh Tareq, the defendants' main attorney.

Yaacoub also asked Utafi to implement Yemeni law to the letter, Sheikh Tareq said.

The defendants are accused of going to Yemen at the behest of Islamist leader Abu Hanifa Al Masri to carry out anti-British and anti-U.S. attacks in Aden.

Sanaa has requested the extradition of Masri, a British citizen of Egyptian

citizens might join forces against Bouteflika in the second round, which would be needed if no candidate won more than 50 per cent of the vote in the first round. Some 15 million people are eligible to vote.

Bouteflika has been further weakened by outgoing President Lamine Zeroual's promise of a "fair and transparent" poll with equal opportunities for all contestants, indicating that the government had no preferred candidate.

Zeroual, who is stepping down 19 months early, has warned of unspecified measures against government officials who try to sway the outcome of the election.

Two days ago Lieutenant General Mohammad Lamari, the army chief of staff, ordered his men to "prepare the conditions for a fair poll."

Zeroual has appointed Mohammed Bedjaoui, a highly respected judge, as head of the election committee, and approved what he called complementary measures sought by opposition parties to prevent vote-rigging which has clouded previous polls.

Zeroual's short speech [last week] contained a lot of warnings to those willing to use the military institution and impose their choice," one diplomat said.

Zeroual and other leading politicians, under pressure from mounting economic and social problems aggravated by the slump in oil prices, appear determined to find a constructive way forward for Algeria.